

Library Technicians at Drexel

This is a study of Drexel's five years of experience in offering library school courses to persons interested in working in libraries at the subprofessional level. In some ways the program has proved useful, but in other ways it has not. A major problem has been the high incidence of early dropout. Yet almost a third of the students did B or better work, and two-thirds did C or better work. Efforts are being made to develop better screening procedures for admission and to improve the value of the program to the library community.

THE CURRENT SHORTAGE of librarians has caused the role of the subprofessional to increase in importance. Twenty years ago the ALA Committee for Library Education recommended initiation of a program to train library technicians in order to provide librarians with a trained reserve force. Recent library surveys have recommended certification levels for such personnel, and many large libraries now provide such positions at relatively high levels.¹ A number of special education programs have been established for such personnel in order to prepare them for positions of responsibility.²

Five years ago the graduate school of library science of Drexel Institute of Technology formally instituted a pro-

gram designed to introduce library education to persons interested in librarianship but lacking a college degree. These students, called library technicians, ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-five. Numbering sixty-nine since the program's inception, they were admitted to Drexel on credentials from their schools and colleges and on recommendations from references. This report has been prepared so that the program's value to the students involved and to the school can be calculated.

Courses Taken.—The technicians were allowed to take the school's four introductory courses, totaling fifteen quarter hours: Introduction to Cataloging and Classification, Basic Reference Sources, Library in Society, and Selection of Library Materials. They were admitted to classes attended by graduate students. Since they made up such a small minority in their classes, they did not interfere with the graduate students or slow down the classes in which they participated. It was necessary for them to maintain a grade average of seventy in order to complete these four courses; after two failures they were dismissed. If a student completed the first four courses with an eighty average he could

¹Lowell Martin, *Library Service in Pennsylvania; Present and Proposed* (2 vols.; Harrisburg: State Library, 1958); The Free Library of Philadelphia lists a Library Assistant III level with pay scale \$4,871 to \$6,015.

²"Junior Personnel for Libraries in Toledo," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, XXXVII (March 1963), 524; Jane Daniels, "Aid thru Aides," *Library Journal*, LXXXVIII (June 1, 1963), 2194-97; Gertrude Annan, "Library Technicians; Need, Training, Potential," *Medical Library Association Bulletin*, LII (January 1962), 72-80.

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TABLE 1
NUMBER OF COURSES TAKEN BY STUDENTS

	Students	Per Cent
More than 4	7	10
3 to 4 courses	11	16
1 to 2 courses	50	73
No record (withdrew)	1	1
Total	69	100

obtain permission to take one or two more. In any case, the student remained a nondegree candidate not receiving graduate credit.

Of the sixty-nine students enrolled, few took advantage of the privilege of taking four courses. Fifty, or 73 per cent, took only one or two courses. Only 16 per cent took three or four courses, and only 10 per cent went beyond the first four courses (See Table 1).

Fourteen, or 20 per cent of the students failed to maintain the necessary grade average for the first four courses. Table 2 shows 35 per cent to have had grade averages between seventy and seventy-nine, and 28 per cent to have been in the eighty to eighty-nine range. Three students obtained averages above ninety, but took only one course. Two of these students had no college background, whereas one had two years of college; one was a medical school assistant librarian; the second was a DuPont Company secretary, and the last held no position while at Drexel.

Positions and Grades.—This program was expected to attract persons who

were already working in subprofessional library positions. Interestingly enough only two-thirds actually had library positions (Table 3). Most of them were at the clerical or subprofessional level, but several were considered to be filling professional positions, and a few were head librarians in schools and business firms.

Sixteen per cent of the technicians had other types of positions. Most of them were typists or secretaries. The group also included a nurse, a teacher, and a managing editor of a newspaper.

It is interesting to match grade averages with the types of positions held by these students. Those who had positions outside the library field had the best over-all average: eighty-one. Students with library positions maintained a combined average of seventy-five, but those students who held no positions had a combined average of only sixty-nine.

About half of the technicians had some college background (Table 4), but they had surprisingly little better grade averages than those who had not been to

TABLE 2
GRADE AVERAGES

	Students	Per Cent
90-100	3	4
80-89	19	28
70-79	24	35
Below 70	14	20
No grade (Audit, Incomplete)	9	13
Total	69	100

TABLE 3
POSITIONS HELD WHILE IN LIBRARY SCHOOL

	Students	Per Cent	Grade Average
Library Positions	45	65	75
Other Positions	11	16	81
No Position	13	19	69
Total	69	100	75

TABLE 4
COLLEGE BACKGROUND

	Students	Per Cent	Grade Average
With previous college work	35	51	76
With no previous college work	34	49	75
Total	69	100	

college, seventy-six as contrasted with seventy-five.

Evaluation.—The library technician program is valuable to the profession only if it produces capable subprofessionals whose capacity for superior work has been improved. Has the Drexel program been successful in achieving this goal? The answer must be *yes* in some respects and *no* in others.

The program has produced a number of students who completed the introductory courses successfully and went into the library world better prepared to make a useful contribution. After three or more courses, several of them achieved grade averages superior to those obtained by most graduate students; no doubt these people became valuable employees. For these students and the libraries which employed them Drexel performed an important service by giving them an introduction to the essentials of librarianship. Less than a fourth of the entire group can be placed in this category.

The majority failed to make good grades (above 80 or B), though they did make grades above 70 or C. Therefore, based on grades, the program has been only partially successful. The 55 per cent

with averages below 80 per cent can be compared to 14 per cent of the graduate student body with averages below 80 per cent.

Perhaps more serious, however, is the fact that most technicians dropped out of the program early, only a fourth completing three or four courses. For the early dropouts, the value of the program was reduced to the value of only one or two courses. Although some had to withdraw because of low averages, it is disappointing that the others did not take advantage of the opportunity to take more courses. It is hard to decide what factors could be used at the time of admission which might better separate the early dropouts from those willing to stay through the entire program.

Each quarter several technicians take courses at Drexel. Students presently in the program have had more college work than their predecessors and are maintaining a considerably higher combined grade average. A new pattern has been developed for admissions by restricting according to previous educational level, grades, library experience, and personal interviews. Through an improved program Drexel hopes to make a more important contribution to the library world.

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