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# The College Library and the Community

by

E. J. Josey

Many colleges and universities in the United States offer a variety of extension services to their respective communities. These services are not only of great benefit to the community, but they are of great public relations value to institutions of higher learning. Annual reports from the offices of the presidents of state universities and colleges glow with statistics which show the taxpayer how much he receives for his tax dollar. Reports from the offices of the presidents of church related institutions scintillate with statements which ring with satisfaction over the number of professors or students who speak at worship services or serve in church summer camps and other social agencies. These activities are part of the overall commitment of institutions of higher learning to the American community.

The college library as an integral part of the college is in a unique position to serve the community in a variety of ways. There are some academic librarians who question the feasibility of the college library's entry into this "extra-curricular" or co-curricular field. These librarians have raised some serious questions. With the tidal wave of students descending upon the nation's campuses, coupled with the library's becoming a central force in independent study, should the library take on this added responsibility? Since a large number of college libraries do not have an adequate book collection to take care of its present student enrollment, will these libraries be robbing Peter to pay Paul? Since many libraries do not receive five per cent of their total institutional budget which is necessary for minimal financial conditions for adequate library service, are libraries justified in spending any part of their meager funds for a constituency that could be very well provided for by the public library? Is it fair or sound to insist that the present overburdened staffs that are plagued by the shortage of professionally trained librarians undertake this additional time consuming responsibility? The foregoing are soul-searching questions.

Let us look at the first question. Library literature abounds with views on the plight of the college library in view of the expected tidal wave of students. Librarians are eagerly looking forward to the day that the college library will become the central force in the education of college students. Most college librarians welcome the prospect of professors placing more of the burden of learning in the laps of students. Independent study will be a turn from spoon feeding to learning. Instead of relying upon two or three books or two or three extracts on reserve, college librarians foresee the use of a wider range of books and materials by college students. All of the statements in the preceding paragraph presuppose that professors will revolutionize

their teaching methods to take care of the tidal wave, that college libraries will increase their book collections and make them accessible by eliminating barriers, and that libraries will be jammed with students drinking at the fountain of knowledge. If this college library utopia comes into being, what kind of community service can the college library offer? Should the library lend its books and materials to community borrowers with the possibility that these materials will not be available for the independent learning college student?

College libraries across the nation have varying policies that govern the borrowing of books and materials by people from the community. Some are more liberal than others. If the college library desires to be an integral part of the total institutional public relations program, it seems that books and materials should be lent, when these materials are not accessible at the public library. Of course certain adequate safeguards should be established. Books that are in heavy demand by students and faculty or books that are on reserve should not be circulated to off-campus borrowers, unless they are circulated on an overnight loan basis. Townspeople should be compelled to show some form of identification; a driver's license or social security card will suffice. Since the college library must protect itself from a possible charge "that everytime I want a particular book, someone off-campus who is not connected with the college has it," some kind of solution must be found. One possible suggestion that may be used to protect the college's constituency, the faculty and students, is to suggest to community borrowers in advance that if the book is needed on campus for instructional or research purposes, the library reserves the right to call for the book. The circulation of books to community borrowers with adequate safeguards is one of the services that the college library can offer its community.

Turning to the question regarding the inadequacy of present college library book collections, this point of view we cannot refute. Unfortunately, hundreds of American college libraries do not meet the new standards for book collections which are of primary importance in fulfilling the educational role of the college.<sup>1</sup> In most American college libraries, only one-fourth of the total book collection is ever circulated. Therefore, the very small percentage of community borrowers will not hinder the work of the college instructional program. At the Savannah State College Library during the 1960-61 academic year, community borrowers accounted for only fifteen per cent of the total circulation, a rather negligible quantity. On the positive side of the ledger, many books circulated to community borrowers are not gathering dust on the shelves. Even though our book collections are small, we can still perform a vital community service through lending books and materials to community borrowers.

The loan of books and materials to local citizens will not open the flood gates for persons who are not serious readers. It has been the experience of most college librarians that, by and large, members

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<sup>1</sup>"ALA Standards for College Libraries," *College and Research Libraries*, 20:278, July 1959.

of the alumni make up the bulk of the borrowers, and, certainly, the library could be the medium through which an alumnus endears himself to his alma mater. It has been the experience of many college librarians that professional people, e.g., public school teachers, social workers, doctors, ministers, etc., constitute the largest percentage of community borrowers.

Should high school students be permitted to borrow? Many college libraries exclude the use of their libraries by high school students. Some academic libraries require that high school students bring a statement from the high school librarian attesting to the fact that the material desired is not in the high school library collection. This requirement is a deterrent to local high school students. Professional persons and alumni who make up the bulk of persons from the local community are excellent library patrons, for they are grateful for the privilege of borrowing needed materials, and, in the final analysis, they represent not only the college library's public, but the college's vital public.

The third question deals with finance. It is true that many of our college libraries do not receive enough funds to provide minimal essentials, and this constitutes a real threat to adequate library service. It is the opinion of this writer that college libraries do not have to spend additional funds for the sole purpose of extending community services. The Savannah State College Library offers three programs which are aimed at the community as well as the college, and funds are not taken from the library budget for these services.

The new library building opened in 1959. The librarian observed that many children from the community were fascinated by the new building and came out of curiosity to see and to visit the imposing structure. Out of the frequent visits of the children was born the "Let's Listen to a Story Hour" for the children of the community. The story hour is held every Thursday afternoon from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. under the direction of the Circulation Librarian, Miss Althea Williams. No additional funds were necessary to launch the program, which has become very popular with the children of the community.

The story hour serves a four-fold purpose. Firstly, it gives the children a specific day to come to the college library which cuts down on the visits of the little ones, in many instances, at odd and inopportune times. Secondly, Savannah State College is situated in the township of Thunderbolt, which is five miles from the Savannah Public Library which conducts a story hour for children. Since distance is a militating factor, these children would not have the pleasure of a story hour. Thirdly, the story hour generates an interest in children's books, and following the story hour, the children are given an opportunity to borrow books from the children's collection. And fourthly, the story hour introduces this group of youngsters to the wonderful world of books at an early age.

The second service offered by the Savannah State College Library is its Great Books Discussion Group. People from the community,

interested faculty, and a few students meet fortnightly to discuss some of the persistent philosophical and practical problems which have plagued man from time immemorial. These discussions bring together busy faculty members and community folk who would not otherwise have an opportunity for this kind of intellectual intercourse. Since each participant purchases his own set of readings, no funds are needed to operate this kind of activity. The intellectual stimulation which comes from this kind of activity for community folk can do much to garner their support for the College more than hundreds of public relations memoranda or news releases.

The Library Lecture Series serves as the third vehicle for offering a program to promote community and college relations. Our Library Lecture Series at Savannah State, although organized ostensibly to bring noted authors to the campus for the cultural benefit of students and faculty, has always been open to local citizens. The appearance of James Baldwin, one of America's brilliant young writers, on our campus last year created a serious problem of community folk taking seating and standing space from students and faculty. The overwhelming response from the community through their attendance of the lectures is indicative of the intellectual hunger for this kind of activity. When Mr. Baldwin appeared on the TODAY TV show, the College Library telephone was busy with callers expressing their pleasure for having met him at the Library Lecture Series.

There is the thorny problem of money for the lecture series. Nevertheless, many American authors will come to a college campus for virtually nothing if some serious efforts are put forth for their services. Some authors are not as altruistic as others. It seems that the foundations could be of help to college libraries in this endeavor. If we are to eradicate much of the intellectual sterility on our college campuses, there must be a communion of kindred spirits, i.e., those who grapple with ideas and write and those who read and work with ideas, must have the opportunity to meet face to face in the market place and exchange points of view. Listening to outstanding authors and specialists in various disciplines can do much to encourage more voluntary reading. Both activities tend to rid our campuses of intellectual sterility. Contrary to Professor Jacob's view, American college students of the 1960's are concerned about the problems that beset their world. The recent wave of students to our nation's capitol to protest the continued nuclear armaments race shows crystal clear the involvement of the new generation of college students. A library lecture series dealing with many of the pressing problems of our times could help our college students and the concerned adult community in their search for alternatives.

The last question regarding overworked staffs that are plagued by shortage of trained personnel is by no means least in importance. Quality library service depends upon a well trained staff that is able to administer the library resources. Certainly, the nature of community services offered will, for all intents and purposes, revolve around a dedicated staff. The average library administrator is on shaky ground if he is not cognizant of the morale of his staff.

If the community services of the college library are to be successful, it is imperative that the staff is sympathetic with the program. As a matter of fact, the staff should be a part of the planning. For out of the group dynamics that pervades library-staff planned programs better objectives and outcomes are realized. It has been our experience at Savannah State that when apprized of the plans, staff members go beyond the call of duty in order to ensure the success of the program. To illustrate, the Circulation Librarian refers to the youngsters who attend the story hour as "my children" and often buys lollipops, etc., for them. The librarian who serves as one of the co-leaders for the Great Books Discussion does not have to concern himself with reminding participants of the next reading, for his secretary diligently assumes this responsibility. The Catalog Librarian eagerly compiles a bibliography of works by and about the lecturer for distribution at the lecture series. The Reference Librarian, who is gifted with the ability to plan refreshments for the lecture series, arranges and works with the College's Director of Food Services for this important phase of the program; this is important, for many students and townfolk are afforded a rare treat when they are able to remain after a lecture to share a cup of coffee and a sandwich or cookies with the distinguished lecturer. Student assistants are always anxious to be of service. A dedicated staff is essential to the success of library extension services.

The utilization of the library staff outside the library is helpful. Reviewing books or giving book talks at PTA meetings and other social clubs are of real public service value. High school librarians usually call on their colleagues in the college library to appear at assemblies and make addresses during National Library Week or career day conferences. As debtors to their profession, college librarians should welcome the occasion to recruit for librarianship by representing the profession. Serving on accreditation committees of regional accrediting associations for the evaluation of local high school libraries is an excellent opportunity for college librarians to remain abreast of the problems of the high school library. The foregoing would suggest that college librarians are supermen. This kind of activity would not suggest that college librarians are supermen, but that college librarians are assuming an important educational role in the academic community. If college librarians are given the opportunity to participate as consultants in several community projects; this participation will not only benefit the community, but will also be edifying to librarians, for they will be taken away from the exacting routine of the library and given a chance to gain new perspectives as well as remain intellectually solvent. College librarians participating effectively in a variety of off-campus activities are as vital to the public image of the college serving the educational needs of the community as the engineering professor serving as consultant to the local industrial community.

During the last thirty years, there has been abundant emphasis upon college public relations. In the years ahead there will be greater emphasis given to the role of the college in its community. Public relations officers need not go to Madison Avenue for assistance, for the library stands as the one agency on the campus that could become

the real intellectual community center. Why cannot these tried methods of lending books to citizens of the community, story hours for children when this service is absent in the community, a library lecture series or forum, a great books discussion group and the use of the library staff as consultants be employed toward the building of good relations between town and gown.

It is true that these suggestions are not new. Many college libraries are sponsoring some or all of these kinds of programs. Yet there are hundreds of academic libraries that confine all their activities within the confines of the academic ivory tower, and, therefore, these libraries lose the opportunity of creating friends for their institutions and possible donors to their collections. It is also true that these programs do demand a little effort beyond the call of duty. It is here that the decision must be made by the administrator of the library.

At Savannah State we have received tangible rewards from our decision. As we view one of our community programs, the Great Books Discussion Group, we are happy to report that it is now an integral part of the intellectual milieu of the campus. The growing enthusiasm within the group, coupled with the many new persons who have recently joined, refutes the prevailing stereotype that most Americans—even on college campuses—have rejected books and reading. The discussions which take place fortnightly in the seminar room of the College Library negate the image of Americans sitting around conversationless, and watching innocuous fifth-grade level television programs.

A library is a vital organ in the instructional program of the college. It can be an important artery in the total program of the college. No academic institution can have a surplus of good will for its immediate community. The college library can be that instrument for promoting friendly relations. Grappling with the necessity of providing continuing education for their citizens in this age of rapid change, townspeople will welcome the cultural oasis of the local college library. The suggested programs outlined above represent only a few of the many possibilities for the use of the college library in the public relations program. Since there is serious competition among various agencies in the community for public support and financial aid, colleges are facing a new situation demanding new ideas and a new kind of leadership. The college library can provide this new kind of leadership.