

# Fees for Research Library Use by "Outsiders": A Symposium

WHEN THE EDITORS received the statement of Dr. Sypher, it appeared that an important problem of general concern had been opened for discussion. In an effort to bring together the specific thinking on the problem, Dr. Metcalf and Dr. White were asked to comment on the situation in their institutions. Dr. Wilson was asked to provide his general observations on the problem.

By WYLIE SYPHER

## Views on the Fee Policy\*

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FIRST MAY I stress that I do not speak as a professional librarian but as one who is often responsible for appointing young scholars to teaching positions, as one who has used great research libraries here and abroad, and as a Harvard graduate who is disturbed by the present policy of fees at Widener. May I also say that I am idealist enough to view the research library essentially as an educational institution rather than as a business that must pay its way; its educational service, in fact, is precisely the claim of the private research library to donations or endowments.

Certainly I have no argument against levying fees upon undergraduates or graduate students who wish to use the Harvard Libraries as an aid to completing their degrees in another institution. Instead, I am concerned with the increasing fees levied by research libraries if they are levied on *bona fide* scholars not primarily occupied in earning degrees in "outside" institutions, if they are levied

primarily as a means of revenue, if they are levied as a sole method of "screening" readers, and if they are levied on the principle of so much per book borrowed.

A letter recently circulated among the Greater Boston chapters of the American Association of University Professors puts the case against the current Harvard policy very adequately: "Such a policy can be a genuine impediment to qualified scholars and teachers who have hitherto depended on the principle of free availability of library resources for their research. It tends to place research on an ability-to-pay basis and may appreciably increase the cost of scholarship for young teachers, who are least able to afford it. It suggests, furthermore, a precedent for other research libraries—a precedent that might impose a general limitation on scholarship. It suggests a parochial use of great research libraries that have been endowed and enriched precisely because they can be of national, rather than institutional, status."

I confess that my concern is not only for the research workers: the ordinary undergraduate teacher, if he is taking his teaching seriously, often needs the resources of great "research" libraries as badly as the scholar engaged solely in research; and the distinction between the

\* In the College Group of the Mid-Winter Meeting of the Massachusetts Library Association, in Boston, February 21, 1952, Keyes D. Metcalf stated the case for the new policy of fees at Widener Library. The following is a summary of the reply to Mr. Metcalf.

teachers engaged in research and teachers engaged simply in teaching is in many ways a false and damaging one, since the teacher engaged solely in teaching may be doing as much for education as the research worker. This teacher, carrying a full schedule of classes, seldom has time to work in Widener itself; he must actually borrow the books he needs—at twenty cents per volume. Now more than ever, younger men who have completed their Ph.D.'s and who have been trained in research are compelled to take positions, often in remote colleges, at obviously inadequate salaries. As one librarian has said, teachers are getting poorer and poorer. They simply cannot afford to continue their research or scholarship if specialized libraries, as a group, levy fees. And under the Farmington plan, many libraries in the future may become specialized collections.

The suggestion has been made that each college establish a "research fund" to cover the fees of its faculty who need to use research libraries. Such a plan encourages undesirable competition between members of the same faculty; it also means that a teacher has to *prove* his right to research materials. Besides, any such fund would probably be more available to the older teachers on the faculty than to the incoming young men, who are the grass roots of scholarship throughout the country. In addition, it is often difficult, especially in the humanities, to predict what materials will be needed for completing a project in research, which is apt to expand in unexpected directions.

In short, the current tendency to levy fees would seem to build tariff walls about the major research libraries and create a monopoly on research materials for those who are already affiliated with major research institutions. At the moment there are few enough inducements to enter either scholarship or teaching. One of these inducements has traditionally been freedom of access to books. A policy of fees could help close careers to talents, especially the younger talents.

Here we come to an uglier question: the question whether Harvard has the right to impose such fees while it solicits philanthropy by making pleas for "The maintenance of the Widener Library on its present status as the greatest university library in America. . . . Widener is pre-eminently a graduate-service institution, and deserves widespread support on this basis" (Open letter from The Harvard Foundation for Advanced Study and Research). The temptation is strong to say that if Widener receives this widespread support and then makes its materials freely available only to scholars and research workers who are directly affiliated with Harvard, we must do all we can to promote public support for public, free libraries. This, of course, may mean the government in the research library. Yet if the private university library cannot adequately serve the needs of scholars—especially the young scholars now employed as underpaid teachers—it has weakened its claim to be looked upon as an educational institution in the national and social sense of the term.

I shall not stress my doubt about the effect of fees on public relations. According to Mr. Conant's 1950-51 President's Report, "Without the College Library the scholars in the social sciences and the humanities would be helpless; . . . some \$600,000 represents Harvard endowment income that goes to provide facilities required by scholars." Whether the \$4,000 a year collected from fees paid to Widener by "outside" scholars is adequate compensation to Harvard for the resentment and embarrassment these fees have caused is a question I cannot answer.

Without wishing to dramatize, I am inclined to quote John Milton, who in the seventeenth century wrote that he who kills a book strikes at that ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself. Milton was protesting against the political censorship of books. May not this sort of library fee be a form of economic censorship, based on one's ability to pay? Is this censorship of a lower order than political censorship? These are important questions for librarians to ponder.

## The Situation at Harvard

*Dr. Metcalf is director of libraries, Harvard University.*

THE HARVARD Library seems to have been responsible for current discussion of library fees for "outsiders" because it raised the question for consideration at meetings of the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College and Reference Libraries, and because it changed its own fee system a year ago. Consequently its librarian is glad to have this opportunity to describe exactly what action Harvard has taken and to consider as objectively as possible the general problem of fees that are charged for the use of university libraries.

As far as can be learned, a fee—\$5 per annum for Harvard graduates and for other persons not connected with the university who wished to use more of the Harvard College Library than its reading rooms and catalogues and had applied and were accepted by the library—was first provided for during 1878, within a year after Justin Winsor became librarian of Harvard College. This remained in effect for seventy-three years without change until, on July 1, 1951, in accordance with recommendations of the librarian and the Faculty Library Committee, the president and fellows of Harvard College authorized the new regulations described below.

The amount of the fee was changed from \$5 to \$10 per annum. A custom of exempting many persons from payment of the fee had grown up, but it was now agreed that very few exceptions would be made. The new fee continued to permit unlimited use of library books within the building, but, unlike the old one, entitled each person who paid it to borrow not more than fifty books for home use. Anyone who wishes to borrow more than that number must now pay a second \$10 before he borrows the fifty-first book; the second fee, of course, entitles him to use the library for a year from the date of payment and to borrow another fifty books during that period. No change was made in the established custom of lending books to other libraries free of charge except for transporta-

tion costs. Visiting scholars from outside the Boston metropolitan area continue to pay no fee, except that they are now regarded as local residents and charged \$10 if they use the library for longer than three months or if they wish to take out books for home use.

The policy of charging local residents who have no connection with the university is not new, and the increase from \$5 to \$10, considering what happened to the price scale between 1878 and 1951, could hardly be called unreasonable. There has been little comment on the policy of strict enforcement, as it is realized that complications are sure to result if exceptions are made for any one other than a few special groups such as persons who have made large gifts. Indeed, the total number of complaints has not been large, although the librarian has gone out of his way to invite comment. Of the objections that have been made, the most common are that the fifty-book limit is undesirable; that, in any case, there ought to be no limit on those who have Harvard degrees; and that out-of-town visitors ought not to be charged for taking books from the building.

The extent to which the Harvard Library is used by "outsiders" has some bearing on the problem. Widener, the central unit of the university library, has served as many as 1200 visiting scholars during a year in addition to several hundred residents of the Boston area, and now handles approximately 10,000 applications for interlibrary loan per annum. Houghton, which houses most of Harvard's rare books and manuscripts, is used by about 1200 individuals in the course of a year, and nearly half of these have no direct connection with the university. No figures are available for total use of the university library, which contains nearly 5,750,000 volumes and pamphlets, only about one-third of which are in the Widener building, but it has been estimated that, if Harvard were thinking of its own work alone, it could be served very nearly as well by a collection only half so large as it has. The university spends two million dollars annually on its library; at least a quarter of this sum has to be spent

because the library has become, for practical purposes, a national institution.

Another consideration bearing upon the question of fees is that Harvard graduate students, when they are writing their dissertations after having completed their course work, pay \$100 per annum as tuition. This has been known in the past as a "library fee" though it entitles students to use of laboratories and to consultation with members of the faculty as well as to library privileges; in any case, it may not seem entirely fair for Harvard to require its own students to pay this if it admits persons from other universities, who have never paid any Harvard tuition, to free use of its library for more than a short period of time.

Receipts from the \$10 fee for use of Widener amounted, during its first year, to \$4,300, or two-thirds of one per cent of total Widener expenditures. Obviously, the monetary return is not of vital importance, though this income was spent for books, and an extra \$4,300 for that purpose is not to be ignored in these days of restricted budgets and inflated prices.

Dean Sypher's article is an excellent statement of the dangers that scholarship would face if a system of institutional tariff barriers were to arise. Librarians can readily understand this attitude, and so can scholars, particularly those Harvard students and instructors who hope to use the Harvard Library, or other libraries for that matter, after they have left the university and had counted on being able to do so free of charge.

The writer, however, believes that the crux of the matter is not the \$4,300, nor the fact that the actual cost of lending a volume for home use comes to more than the twenty cents that is charged, nor that Harvard, if it charged no fee, would be subsidizing "outsiders" from its endowment funds and reducing the service that it can give to members of the university for whom it has primary responsibility. The crux of the matter, he submits, relates to the effect of fees on public relations and on interlibrary cooperation.

Many of the books and many of the funds that have been given to the Harvard Library have been given, it is asserted, because the Library is a national institution with resources available to all scholars. Consequently, the argument continues, the library has no right to charge for the use of material that has come to it on this basis. On the

other hand, it can be argued that a very large percentage of the books and funds came from men interested in Harvard only, and one might add that prospective donors might well hesitate to give money to a great research library that was dissipating its funds by welcoming all comers free of charge. Certainly, if Harvard is not to maintain a public library for Cambridge or for the whole Boston area, there must be some restrictions.

The second question, which seems still more important, is whether Harvard's fee will help or hinder interlibrary cooperation. Though it has the country's largest university library, Harvard is fully aware that it cannot possess all the books that its scholars need, but must expect in the future to depend more and more on other libraries. It is continuing to support plans and programs for joint acquisition, cooperative storage, further extension of interlibrary loan, development of union catalogs and lists, and similar enterprises, all of which it regards as essential. The dangers of tariffs and other restrictions are realized. Harvard hopes that scholars in other institutions, when they cannot find the material they need at home, will continue to visit its library and to borrow from it through interlibrary loan.

The answers are not obvious. Surely the whole problem deserves careful study with all its ramifications in mind. A cooperative acquisition program may call upon the library to spend \$10,000 per annum for books that it would not otherwise purchase but is acquiring for the sake of the country as a whole. This, of course, is only the first step, for processing the books may cost a second \$10,000, and storage as much more. If these books, on which perhaps \$30,000 has been spent, are then used more frequently by "outsiders" than by members of the university's own faculty and student body, it seems inevitable that there will be objections to the cooperative program in question. It may be easier to answer such objections if the library is, at least, collecting from outside users part of the cost of actual service to them.

These are the essentials of the problem of fees as this author sees it; he does not think he knows what ought to be done, but has welcomed this opportunity for discussion because he is convinced that the question is important, and will become of greater importance if library cooperation is extended as he hopes it will be.

## The Situation at Columbia

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TUITION AT Columbia was \$12.50 a point at the end of World War II. In 1946-47, it rose to \$15 a point; in 1948-49 to \$20. Further measures to meet rising costs had to be taken by 1951, but no one wished to see tuition go any higher. After weeks of discussion, it was decided to leave tuition at \$20 a point, with \$300 as the upper limit for a semester, and raise the university fee from \$10 to \$20 a semester. Up to that time, no one but students formally registered for instruction and research had paid the university fee. The assumption had been (a) that income from these students would splice out endowment income enough to meet the university's costs and (b) that the fairest method of sharing part of these costs among those who helped create them was to confine charges to persons formally registered for course work. The facts brought to light in 1950-51 indicated that neither of these assumptions remained valid and so the application of the university fee was broadened to permit independent registration for the use of certain facilities, including the libraries.

Columbia feels obligated to underwrite the entire library cost of supporting the work of its own officers. A similar obligation holds for those whose work is directly associated with the university in some other important connection. Examples are the Friends of the Columbia Libraries, who are at work in the university's behalf, and officers and students of affiliated institutions.

There are others besides these officers and associates who do not pay the university fee. Any 'visitor' is authorized to use the libraries as a courtesy outright. For simplicity of administration, a 'visitor' is defined as any alumnus, scholar from another university, or other serious reader whose library needs are brief and non-recurring. Experience shows that the needs of most of those who make quick visits to New York City or who come to the university to consult unique materials can be met well within two weeks, a period which

was hit upon in an effort to find a hospitable definition of what is meant by "brief." Requests for the corporation to bear the full cost of service beyond this normal limit usually come from persons who live within commuting distance of the campus and whose library needs are recurring.

There is another class of visitor. It consists of men and women from the Old World and the New who are tapped for writing or research of marked importance and who seek temporary residence at Columbia to further their work. Every effort is being exerted to underwrite the cost of library service to these visiting scholars and each year we are pleased to be able to serve so large a number of them. Procedure for handling their applications is in the hands of the dean of the Graduate Faculties.

It should be stressed in this connection that Columbia has no library fee and the administration of the university fee lies outside the libraries—just as it lies outside the classrooms and the laboratory. The library staff offers service under policies fixed by duly authorized officers of the corporation.

Thus far, we have given attention to readers for whose work the corporation undertakes to pay all library costs. There are others on Morningside Heights who, it was concluded, may reasonably be allowed to share to some extent in these costs. Some of them are working toward advanced degrees. Columbia's reputation as a center of graduate study has, over the years, brought to the libraries an increasing number of students who, having completed course requirements for some advanced degree, remain in residence to use the libraries while doing their research and writing their dissertations. Estimates placed the number of these students at 750 in 1950-51. While many of these well-sifted, energetic students all but live in the libraries, full-time residence prior to the fall of 1951 was free of charge if the student required nothing but library service. The average residence of these readers is around two years, but some of them remain with us a much longer time.

It was agreed in 1951 that there is another

group which could reasonably be asked to share in the cost of operating the facilities they used. This second group consists of persons whose work, often of the first importance, requires prolonged use of the libraries, but who are not at work in, or on call of, the University. New York City has no wealth greater than its wealth of human talent in widely assorted fields of achievement, and these highly-trained scholars and citizens have turned to the Columbia Libraries in impressive numbers. The guest clientele of the libraries probably reached its peak in the years immediately preceding Pearl Harbor. During the war years when these eager demands had let up a bit, our guest population was once estimated to be equal to the student population of Dartmouth College which was then spending more than \$125,000 a year on its library. Up to World War II, Columbia library policy might be likened to the hospitality of the patrician of times long past who did not have to trouble himself or his guests with the delicate question of where the money was coming from to pay the bill. That is, the university expected to set a good table for those officers and registered students whom the libraries exist primarily to serve—and would it not add to the pleasure of all if as many guests came as chose to do so and shared freely what the table afforded.

It has often been pointed out that until recently the Columbia Corporation operated what amounted to a public library. Building superintendents and landladies in the neighborhood pushed the idea a little far by pointing out that their tenants would have access to the University Libraries, and certainly it did not improve library service on the campus to have books borrowed and placed on reserve at nearby institutions where library facilities could stand a little strengthening. But skipping over such excesses, Columbia found—and still finds—pleasure in the idea of sharing its facilities as freely as its resources permit. This goes for instruction facilities and laboratory facilities, no less than for library facilities. The present high charges are not of Columbia's liking nor of her choosing and she is working doggedly, and will continue to work doggedly, to regain a position financially which will enable her to shoulder enough of her library and other costs to keep from denying any deserving person access to her facili-

ties on the ground of financial need.

Meanwhile, the times confront us with some stern alternatives. Columbia receives no tax money. Every dollar she spends comes (a) from some voluntary gift, (b) from income produced by such a gift or (c) from tuition and fees paid by those who register to use her facilities. In spite of heavy taxes, gifts from friends who understand the plight of the independent universities have increased significantly, but not rapidly enough to offset rising costs. Faced by these circumstances, the corporation has had to choose between lowering its standards on one hand and on the other asking those who utilize its services to bear a somewhat larger share of the costs which they help create. Following are some of the reasons which led to the conclusion that it would be fair and right to include library costs among those to be partly shared in this way:

1. It is beyond the resources of the corporation to entertain any idea of offering to pay all of the library costs of all of the thousands of intelligent people who would stand ready to use the Columbia Libraries if the doors were thrown open to all who are capable of making fruitful use of them.

2. Columbia values the opportunity for library service which her location at one of the main crossroads of the world gives her, but the tendency in these times for income to lag behind university requirements poses a question about priority of claim which is even more difficult than in normal times. It is, please note, not a question of her willingness to share her library resources with the public; Columbia takes the greatest pride in her long record of fidelity to the public interest. It is a question rather of how she can *best* invest her resources, of how she can avoid overstretching her commitments and continue to render the *highest quality* of service. In approaching library costs, it will perhaps be agreed universally that her first obligation, if a choice has to be made, is to support her duly appointed officers and her duly registered students. This at least has been an assumption which has influenced recent revision of her library policy.

3. The method of registering readers must be kept simple and not costly to administer. To those whose experience is limited to the university which is never visited in large numbers by persons who have no direct connection with the institution, it may seem simple and inexpensive to grant access on the basis of capacity to make fruitful use of a university library. A little thought will show that it is neither simple

nor inexpensive to administer a metropolitan university library on this basis. Moreover, it runs against the grain to be denied access to a library on the ground that others are *better qualified* than you are to make fruitful use of a library.

4. This brings us to another advantage of the new system—its fairness. It gives the registered student a better deal. Part of the advantage of a further boost in tuition was gained by passing on to unregistered students costs which they were helping create. The student who maintains residence to use the libraries can as reasonably be asked to pay a small share of library costs as the regular student can be asked to pay higher tuition; and as for capacity to pay, the more settled citizen who registers to use the libraries is, as a rule, better able to pay \$20 a semester than either of the other two. Some of the mature citizens whom the libraries serve have been quick to comment on the fairness and simplicity of the new scheme and seem to welcome an opportunity to help "pull their weight."

5. The present policy helps to even up service to alumni. Heretofore, the accident of location has given alumni living within commuting distance service which the university could not hope to extend those farther away.

6. For a good many years, certain highly trained people have been ineligible to use the Columbia Libraries for reasons of their occu-

pation or business connections. The exclusion came about in the first place, I am assured, because the libraries were compelled to draw the line somewhere, but exclusion on grounds of a commercial or industrial connection in a society like ours is pretty difficult to countenance. The new system is both more wholesome and simpler to administer.

7. When university library service is properly evaluated, it is a bargain at \$20 a semester. It amounts to buying three to six good books in return for the opportunity to use a million or two and to receive in addition the attention of three or four hundred devoted librarians.

No qualified reader should be denied access to good university library service for want of funds—if it can be avoided. Like other good things, however, such free access is not really free at all. It is made free to some of us because others pay the costs for us. The larger question is one of university library financing. One way to help maintain the university library standard to which we are accustomed is to allow a larger number of those who benefit from the services of the library to share in the cost of these services. How much we rely on this method will depend on how well society succeeds in finding other ways to pay its university library costs.

By LOUIS R. WILSON

## Should Research Libraries Impose Fees Upon Visiting Scholars?

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THE QUESTION whether research libraries should impose fees upon visiting scholars has assumed new importance as a result of the revision of its fee for the use of the library by "outsiders" which Harvard University put into effect July 1, 1951. Objection to the action taken has been voiced in a letter circulated among the Greater Boston chapters of the American Association of University Professors and by Dean Wylie Sypher, of the Graduate Division of Simmons College.

As I understand it, the revision, to a part of which objection is made, resulted in three

changes: (1) The fee of \$5.00 per year which Harvard, since 1878, had charged for library use by "outsiders," was raised from \$5.00 to \$10.00 per year. (2) The library began to enforce the rule more strictly than it had in the past because exceptions that had previously been made fairly frequently sometimes caused complications. (3) The number of books that could be withdrawn for home use within one year was placed at fifty, and if more than fifty were borrowed, another permit would have to be secured and an additional \$10.00 paid.

The "outsiders" with whom the library has dealt in the past fall into three categories: (1) the residents of the metropolitan area who had a Harvard degree; (2) the residents of the metropolitan area who had never had

any connection with Harvard; and (3) visiting scholars. The Harvard graduate student who is no longer taking courses, but presumably is working on his dissertation, pays \$100.00 per year, but he does not fall within the categories mentioned. Visiting scholars who use materials in the library have not been subject to the fee in the past, and are not required to pay it now unless they wish to use the library for more than three months or borrow books for home use. In those instances, the fee is imposed.

The problem with which the university dealt is a very real one, and is common to all large university libraries, but particularly to libraries of universities located in metropolitan areas. So far as categories one and two are concerned, it has long seemed to me that a fee of some amount might well be charged since the users who find themselves in those categories are residents of the metropolitan area and in a sense are supporting one of their own local institutions whether they are connected with the university or not. It has likewise seemed entirely appropriate to me, though I know of the hardship which it imposes upon them, for graduate students who are not pursuing courses to pay a considerable fee. However, they make heavy demands upon the library for materials and services while preparing for examinations or completing dissertations. They also are likely to confer with instructors concerning their dissertations and thereby utilize time that must be taken from teaching or research.

But for those who fall into category three (visiting scholars), I think the case is somewhat different. If looked at simply from the point of view of the service and cost involved, the fee may seem to be wholly justified. But these appear to be minor considerations. The major consideration is, as Dean Sypher points out, that the practice places a limitation upon the use of the resources of America's greatest university library and, to the extent that it limits use by visiting teachers and scholars, it limits the pursuit of teaching and research. In fact, it does more than that, even though it places the limitation only on visiting scholars who use the library for more than three

months or who borrow books for home use. It sets an example which might be followed by other research libraries. It thereby introduces what may become an obstacle to cooperation among libraries and scholars which is increasingly recognized as the most practical means of meeting the needs of scholars in the face of the almost astronomical multiplication of materials in subject fields and the soaring costs of books and services.

It likewise poses a threat to the comity which exists among American universities, a thing that has value in itself, since all universities find need upon occasion to draw upon the experience and resources of one another in achieving their common goals. The withdrawal of one institution from the circle breaks the informal exchange of information and assistance among universities from which all in varying degrees may at some time profit.

Harvard's standing as one of the nation's very greatest universities carries with it many obligations other than balancing the budget of a specific department or school or library. Its principal obligation is to enhance scholarship, to discover new knowledge. Obviously, it will fulfill this obligation largely through its own staff. But it can at the same time add to the total contribution it makes to learning by aiding the visiting scholar who uses its library services and facilities for more than three months or who borrows books for home use. The imposition of the fee raises the question whether or not the privilege of the use of the library is offered in the spirit which characterizes other forms of university comity and cooperation. The university is the recipient of great gifts in order that it may meet its principal obligation. And the library, being the largest university library in the nation, should be enabled by the university to promote the advancement of scholarship in this way just as the university achieves other scholarly objectives through fellowships, grants-in-aid, and appropriations for research, publications, and other purposes. This is but another means, and at times a most effective one, by which the university may directly contribute to the advancement of the cause of scholarship throughout the world.