

The Library Self-Survey*

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THIS DISCUSSION relating to the library self-survey will be confined to rather brief statements concerning the college survey movement, what we might consider the values of the self-study or self-survey, the ends to which such a study would be directed, and how it might be organized. I have tried to set these remarks in a general philosophical framework so that I trust they may be helpful to you whether you serve in public or private college, with vocational or liberal arts interests.

In a sense, at least, the idea of the self-study is not new to a college library. For years, various kinds of statistics have been and are being gathered by you, as college librarians. These are, in a way, on-going tabulations and do not refer particularly to, although they may be a part of, a major self-study project. Such a project has a definite organization or plan, a well-defined beginning and end, in terms of time, and clearly defined goals or objectives.

The idea of institutional surveys or studies is something relatively new in higher education. The product of the last 50 years, the institutional survey is said by Walter Eells to have had its beginning in 1908 with the Oberlin Study. The story of the survey—and later the self-evaluation movement—was succinctly summarized by C. Robert Pace last spring at the Ninth Annual Conference on Higher Education, sponsored by the Association for Higher Education of the

National Education Association. Major surveys, according to Pace, have been conducted among the church-related colleges, public institutions of higher education in various states, culminating in the report of the President's Commission in 1947. Four significant evaluation projects, emphasizing both measurement and philosophy, conducted in recent years, are the Eight Year Study, the Cooperative College Study, the Commission on Teacher Education, and the Cooperative Study of Evaluation in General Education. Many colleges, as you probably know, have conducted intensive self-studies in the last 20 years; this particular movement has had quite recent support and financial incentive in selected institutions from the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation.

Rather intensive evaluation of an institution has, for approximately 20 years, been a vital part of the accrediting procedures of the Commission on Colleges and Universities of the North Central Association. Some three years ago these procedures were extended to include an institutional self-survey required of institutions prior to their application for membership in the Association. Institutional surveys in this connection have, of course, included the survey of the college library. The North Central Association as a result of its study of criteria in the early 1930's has used the following items as significant indicators of library and, in turn, institutional excellence: reference and periodical holdings, amounts spent for books and library salaries, student and faculty use, and budgetary procedures. Objective data are used today only on the items

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of expenditures for books and periodicals and library salaries. The college library in North Central accrediting procedures is today evaluated, in some measures subjectively, within the general framework of the extent and manner in which the library tends to implement the general purposes or objectives of the institution of which it is an integral part. My own experience with the library self-survey has come largely as a North Central examiner. In that role I have not actually been a participant but rather an onlooker or observer.

Several years ago, in that well-known educational research project, the Eight-Year Study, Ralph Tyler, who was then chairman of the Department of Education of the University of Chicago, listed what he considered as the major purposes of evaluation of student achievement. While his statement is directed toward one particular type of evaluation, it would appear that several of these purposes are just as pertinent to the broader, more general, area of institutional evaluation, or institutional self-evaluation. His statements would pertain with equal facility to that more specialized area of the college, that is, the college library, or to the library self-study, the problem which is our central concern today.

The first such purpose is that evaluation is a check on the effectiveness of the educational institution or, in our particular interest, a check on the effectiveness of the library as an integral part of the total educational institution. Such a continuing kind of examination can show points of effective operation and other points where some changes can materially improve the operation of the library.

Another purpose of evaluation is that it can give a certain psychological security, both to the faculty of the college and to the library staff. Undoubtedly a college faculty and a library staff have a continuing concern, beset with many

doubts, as to whether the major objectives of the institution are being realized. A library self-study can provide this kind of assurance not only to the library staff but also to the college faculty in those areas especially where the library functions as the so-called laboratory of the curriculum and instructional program. Such evaluation procedure can give such assurances to a library staff that there can, in turn, be less need for reliance on extraneous concerns, such as book counting, nose counting, etc.

One additional purpose of the library self-study is that it will give a sound basis for public relations. Here is a means of providing information for taxpayers, boards of trustees, alumni, prospective students. Not only can the strengths of the library be clearly and forcefully portrayed for the edification of potentially interested groups, but also the particular needs of the library, as shown by sound and careful study, can be identified and publicized at the propitious time and place.

One final purpose is that the evaluative process forces the library staff to give serious thought and real consideration to the reasons for the existence of the library itself. It will tend then to help bring those purposes clearly into line with the over-all objectives of the institution of which it is a part.

In brief, then, a library self-study may be a wise move for several important reasons. We have suggested that it can provide a check of the effectiveness of the library; it can provide a kind of psychological security for the library staff and for the college faculty; it can provide a valuable instrument in public relations for the library; and it can force the library staff to formulate clearly the objectives of the library itself.

If it appears now that there is value to be received from a self-study, the next and really important question is, "How does one go about it?" It would seem to me that there are some definite, clear-

cut lines that a self-survey must take. When and if they are not followed, we end up with only busy work on the part of the librarian and his staff.

Certainly in some, if not many, institutions hard thinking has gone into the discussion of the total objectives of the institution. Where this job has been done and done adequately the library self-survey can proceed to the second step. Where the first step has not been done adequately, or has not been done at all, time must be taken to formulate through faculty action a clear-cut statement of the over-all purposes of the college itself.

The second step, and one which I hope is quite obvious, is the need for well-defined purposes for the library itself. It is possible, but I am sure quite unlikely, that the college library does what it is doing or thinks it is doing, only because it always has done just that. Or more unlikely still, the library does what it does because some librarian has known other libraries which have done just that, or were thought to be doing just that. The college library has no *raison d'être* apart from the college of which it is a vital part. It is obvious that the "why and wherefore" of the college library should not be taken lightly. Clearly stated objectives should certainly be formulated by the librarian; these in turn need the support and endorsement of the faculty and administration of the college.

There are many instances on record of objectives which have been set by and for college libraries. Many years ago Randall and Goodrich, as you know, formulated four central functions of the library as they concern the use of books. These are: (1) to furnish the books required for collateral reading in connection with the courses offered, together with related material, including material required by the faculty members' needs for instructional purposes; (2) to furnish books for voluntary reading by

students and to promote their use; (3) to provide a comprehensive selection of authoritative books covering all fields of knowledge, and to make their content easily accessible; and (4) to train students in the use of library materials and to integrate the library with the instructional program.

Many of you are aware of the purposes of the library as prepared by your own Junior College Libraries Section of the American Library Association. In this particular statement we read, "The junior college should provide, or have easily available, library facilities adequate to meet the requirements of the institution's program. The library derives its responsibilities from the purposes of the college it serves and should include the following functions." As the first function we note the statement, "as a materials center," with the following information that books and other library materials to meet the needs and interests of students and faculty must be selected, ordered, cataloged, maintained, and serviced; as a distribution agency the library should be easily accessible to students and faculty; information concerning new materials should be given periodically and frequently to students, faculty, and administrators; occupational and vocational guidance materials must be available for students' use and to supplement the work of counselors. The second main function is "as a teaching agency" with the understanding that instruction in the use of books in libraries must be given to classes and individuals for training student library assistants; cooperation with faculty members in the preparation of teaching materials and bibliographies must be given for developing and improving the curricula; reference aid to individuals should be given. A third function listed in the junior college set of standards is that the junior college library should serve "as a reading center." This refers to reading materials to be made availa-

ble beyond the needs of the instructional program. In this instance reading materials would be available for cultural advancement, for reading guidance, and for encouraging the development of broad and desirable reading interests of all its clientele. As a reading center the library would provide a section for professional books and reading materials for the college faculty. In the situation of a "community college" the services of the college library might well be extended to meet the needs of people in the town.

There is no doubt that the purposes of the college library have been fully explored by many of you in many sessions of this kind. We are concerned at this point only with the fact that it is absolutely necessary that these objectives be clearly and accurately stated for each particular college library. This is step two of the self-survey procedure and it is impossible to move on with the self-survey until this particular question has been clearly faced. It is of very real importance, since the self-survey of the college library must be focused directly on the objectives of the particular library involved. These in a sense become definite goals which in turn are to be measured by the self-study procedure.

It would be proper also for the self-survey to be directed to some extent toward the specific standards which librarians have set for themselves and for their libraries. It seems to me, however, that there is a very real danger in this kind of situation, since in a sense these standards are symbols of excellence rather than excellence itself. These standards in themselves are not the objectives or goals of the library, but they are rather the actual means or conditions which various librarians and college staffs have set for the achievement of the college and library goals. One can imagine the perhaps unlikely possibility of a situation in which all of the library standards are being fully and well met,

but on the other hand the situation of a very mediocre job being performed in terms of actual library service. Professional degrees, amount of reading space, lighting, circulation figures, faculty ranking are indicators of library excellence, but they are not ends within themselves, not the purposes for which the library has been created or for which it continues to exist. Thus I would urge that the library self-study be clearly and specifically organized in terms of the chief purposes, the central objectives, of the college library itself.

There are doubtless some very obvious ways to measure the actual achievement of the major objectives of the college library. In the sense that the library is to provide collateral or extended reading for the courses offered in the college curriculum, it is possible to check library holdings against certain lists of basic holdings prepared by experts in various subject matter fields. A thorough study of the extent of student and faculty withdrawals, and other measures of student and faculty use of these particular materials, will provide a second check. A third check might well be implemented by selected faculty members in order to determine the actual use which students make of these various materials. There are certainly many kinds of library projects which can be designed by faculty members in certain courses to do this job. Another type of investigation relating to this particular objective can involve the use of faculty opinion relating particularly to the effectiveness of the college library. An opinion poll of students might also be very productive and helpful. These suggestions are not thought of as complete and in some sense they may sound perhaps a bit naive to the experienced trained librarian. They do emphasize, I hope, the idea that the library purposes themselves are subject to direct and penetrating evaluation. It is certainly possible to devise ways and means to evalu-

ate all of the various functions which have been set for any particular college library.

Finally, the question of who is to do the job of the self-study is before us. Certainly the continuing or on-going type of self-survey might very well be made, and perhaps is being made, by the librarian and his staff. On the other hand, since the college library is an integral part of the college, the more extensive initial survey might well be made by a special faculty committee on which the librarian would serve as a member. A survey undertaken under such auspices will have all the advantages of being in every way quite objective; the resulting report will thus have faculty endorsement and support. Whether we speak of the continuing type of self-study or of what we might call the single type of self-survey, there is no doubt that the real work—the gathering of statistics, the preparation of questionnaires, the various kinds of analyses, etc.—will all fall to the librarian.

It is especially important, as I mentioned earlier, that the purposes of the self-survey itself be clearly defined. Spe-

cific and valid reasons for doing the job must be decided upon. There should also be a definitely determined schedule arranged and a date set for concluding the survey.

The general plan for the survey and how it is to be conducted are problems to be worked out in each individual institution. There are no doubt good and sufficient reasons for regular and continuing self-studies of the college library. Certainly, a very real satisfaction can surely come either in learning that one's job is being well done or in learning what steps must be taken to bring about such a Utopian situation. The experience of doing a library self-study can be both informational and inspirational.

About five hundred years ago Erasmus wrote these words to a friend, "I know how busy you are in your library." I would hope that this thought will not serve as your rationalization for not considering and launching a library self-survey. Rather, I trust that this thought actually indicates that you, busy as you are today, are the kinds of persons for whom the self-survey has very real meaning and significance.

ACRL Building Institute in Atlanta

A college library building institute will be held at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, on June 14-16 under the auspices of the ACRL Buildings Committee. One day will be devoted to critical discussion of library plans; another day will be given over to papers by leading architects, engineers and decorators on materials and equipment for library buildings. Library tours in the Atlanta area will be scheduled on Saturday, June 16. For further information and for program of topics and speakers (when available) write to Dorothy M. Crosland, Director, Georgia Institute of Technology Libraries, Atlanta, Georgia. Mrs. Crosland is chairman of the ACRL Buildings Committee.