STUDENTS AND THE LIBRARY: A CONSIDERATION OF ONE OBJECTIVE

A major handicap in administering a university library, or any large library, is the lack of opportunities for daily contact between the Librarian and the library's users. Compared with the Reader Services librarians, for instance, the University Librarian's contact with students is small. Thus, during my year as Acting University Librarian, I was dependent on feedback from a variety of sources in order to find out what students expected from the library, where they felt it was not fulfilling their needs, and what were the most urgently required changes. The library still falls far short of our ideal - what library doesn't? But provided the library has a set of positive aims to work towards, deficiencies can gradually be overcome.

The library's aims are, naturally, closely tied to the aims of the institution which it serves. Karl Jaspers states:

Three things are required at a University: professional training, education of the whole man, research. For the University is simultaneously a professional school, a cultural centre and a research institute... All three are factors of a living whole. By isolating them, the spirit of the university perishes.

It is obvious that the library has a major responsibility to provide materials for the academic community to support both professional training and research. This it attempts to do, within the limitations imposed by the budget - we acquire materials, process them so that they are available to academic staff and students, and provide staff and services to assist in their effective utilization. But it is the second of Jaspers' requirements, the 'education of the whole man', that I want to comment on in relation to the library. How can the library effectively participate in this education?

I believe that through access to the widest possible range of materials, students can be helped to develop, in some depth, their interests and abilities, and to discover new ideas and enthusiasms. A library should provide both materials and facilities for a whole range of student activities - not just for reading, but for listening, viewing, discussing. I suggest the following as some of the possible ways in which students can use the library's resources to widen and extend their education and develop interests not catered for in their courses.

I would argue strongly for the value of literature in providing a heightened awareness and understanding both of ourselves and society. Many students regard the literature collections of the library as being relevant to English and French students only - that the collections are not for scientists, economists or engineers. While I realise that many students have very little time for reading outside the disciplines for which they are studying, the

literature collections provide an opportunity for students to develop an interest, perhaps in the work of just one or two authors, which may be extended when the demands of courses and examinations are not so pressing. I might mention that assistance and guidance in exploring this vast field is always available from senior library staff.

Many libraries today are developing audio-visual facilities. We hope soon to be able to provide a wider range of records and tapes, so that students can come to the library not only to read a play or poem, but to listen to a recording of it, possibly by one of the world's great theatre companies or actors. Recorded music will play a more prominent part in the library's resources, and students will have greater opportunities to listen to music beyond the range of that normally performed in Townsville.

Displays are another way in which a student's imagination may be captured by a subject, whether it is early North Queensland history, or pollution, or German expressionism. We are always glad to receive suggestions from students for possible topics, and we plan, when the library building is completed, to have a more extensive display area and to mount more frequent displays on topics of special interest or relevance.

The General Reading Collection of paperback books was established in response to a need by students for recreational reading not related to their courses. The collection covers a wide range of subjects and is designed to stimulate enquiry and to encourage new interests, as well as to provide material for relaxation. The development of this collection depends on a continuing interest by students, as well as on our ability to provide the type of material students want to read. From my experience this covers a very wide field.

There are several other aspects of the library which I think can contribute to a student's personal development; for instance, the newspapers from several countries giving varying viewpoints on the international news; the literary magazines and book review journals; and the weekly current affairs magazines. A little time each week which can be set aside for browsing and keeping up to date with issues, ideas and trends is necessary to prevent the sense of isolation from the community. A sympathetic awareness of society and its problems, and the intellectual ability necessary to produce creative solutions to these problems, can be developed by wide reading, thinking, listening, discussing; and I believe the library has an important role to play in sharing, guiding and developing student interests and helping in the development of ideals which can, when necessary, withstand the society's pressures to conformity and mediocrity.

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