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Spring 1997: It Takes a Faculty to Build a Library

Dacus Library

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the dean's corner

It takes a faculty to build a library

How then are great libraries and particularly great library collections built? In my experience, the one indispensable factor is the faculty.

For over 30 years I have guided academic libraries, and in that time one transcendent truth has become clearer and clearer to me. Great libraries are not built by university administrators or in the final analysis by librarians.

Lord knows they are not built by politicians or businessmen who have found the "answers" and decide to bring their new found wisdom to the running of educational bureaucracies. If the latter needs any confirmation, one need only review the total absence of any mention of libraries, intelligent or otherwise, in South Carolina's new "performance indicators" that will presumably determine the size and direction of college and university budgets in the future.

The library community put forward specific and well thought out suggestions. They were not even acknowledged, let alone acted upon. For those dwindling few who honestly feel the "indicators" presage a brighter day for higher education in South Carolina, this was not an encouraging sign.

How then are great libraries and particularly great library collections built? In my experience, the one indispensable factor is the faculty—intelligent, energetic, persistent, and thoroughly committed to seeing that the library, the treasure house for scholarly communication on a campus, has the resources that are essential and is using them wisely in response to the research and teaching mandates of the institution. Lacking this, financial support for the library will be reluctant, sporadic, and woefully inadequate.

The Winthrop record in this regard is mixed. In recent years the library committee of the Faculty Conference has taken its work seriously and has done its best to keep the faculty and students informed of what was needed to insure the adequacy (the "adequacy" mind you. . .not "greatness") of collections and services. Committee chairs like Lynn Willoughby and Tom Polaski (Arts and Sciences), Han Vo (Business), Peg DeLamater (Visual and Performing Arts), and Nell Braswell (Education) have brought a universal, not a parochial, viewpoint to expressing these needs.

Particularly noteworthy was the Committee's report of 1994-95 entitled *Scholarly Communication and Dacus Library: With or Without Walls.* Yet despite this report and other efforts, the library currently receives only 3.17 percent of the university's educational and general expenditures, approximately half of the 6 percent minimum recommended by the Association of College and Research Libraries.

Surely, it is time for the university to come to grips with this problem. This is a problem that extends far beyond the temporary effort to get a new program approved or to pass the review of an accreditation team. As important as these are, the efforts of

students and faculty must be directed to insuring a reasonable base budget for the library so that we are not faced with yearly financial crises. The library requested $35,000 this fall to bring its funding up to the level expended the previous year. Twenty thousand dollars was received and, of that, $8,000 went to book allocations and $12,000 to essential computer equipment. Now, we must look to the 1997-98 budget year and see if we can devise a strategy that will preclude the necessity for the last minute corrections that have become a staple of the budget process at the university and that make strategic planning and wise spending difficult for all of us.

It is always easy to point fingers and assess blame, but not much lasting good comes from such a tactic. My own preference is to cite good examples and to learn from them. One of the best of these examples is the North Carolina State University Library which is using tuition money to purchase essential electronic databases. As reported in the last issue of their *Focus* newsletter, over $400,000 of "head start" money was used in 1996 to purchase 70 databases ranging from *African American Poets* to *Zoological Record*. Expanding our electronic index collection at Winthrop and networking our CD-ROM lab have long been two of the Dacus Library's top priorities. As an institution we should look at the technology fee paid by students to see if its use could be extended to these essential student services, as it is at a number of our peer institutions in the surrounding states of North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

In our pursuit of an adequate budget for the library, we will be following a three fold strategy. First, in keeping with the central theme of this essay, we will be meeting with interested departmental chairs and library liaisons to find out what their library needs are and how we can help meet them. Those with the greatest needs obviously should, along with their deans, join us in this effort to see the library as the heart of the academic enterprise, not just one more special interest.

Second, we will immediately begin a three-year budget plan for the library, conservatively cast with the understanding that the next few years are likely to see only modest growth in the university budget. (Indeed, when was the last time it was not modest in South Caro-lina?) This will be combined with goals and objectives for the library program and a prioritized listing of the major collection, service, and automation projects that should be funded if special monies become available. But before we take on these new projects, we must first have a base budget that will slow our library's long decline in the number of books and journals purchased.

Finally, we will continue our several efforts to seek private money and to engage in cooperative ventures with other libraries. This will mean publicizing the efforts of the new Friends of the Library group, conducting book sales, promoting the Adopt-A-Book program, forming a library advisory board to the capital campaign, and working with a variety of state groups ranging from the State Library to the Library Directors Forum. All of these efforts are underway.

If you would like to assist in any of the ventures mentioned in this essay, please call me in the library with your views, criticisms, and suggestions. Whether or not it takes a village to raise a child, you can be sure it takes a faculty to build a library.

Paul Z. DuBois
Dean of Library Services

the dean's corner

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