



Spring 1998

Spring 1998: Serving Our Publics

Dacus Library

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the dean's corner

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Serving our publics

Students and faculty are only two of the publics we serve

When mission statement time rolls around, our library like many other academic libraries, repeats the familiar dictum that our principal mission is "to meet the teaching and research needs of Winthrop students and faculty." It is the kind of platitudinous boilerplate that goes into most mission statements. No one pays much attention to it, and, in this case, it is perhaps just as well because it gives a very narrow view of the publics we serve. We do, indeed, focus on serving our own students and faculty. And despite modest funding, we do a very good job of it by most reports. Still, they are only two of the publics we serve.

The last time we counted, we were currently dealing with over a dozen I. D. cards in the Dacus Library and those are just the publics who have their own identification cards. Just to mention a few of these users, we issue cards to Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate students in the local schools while

another set of cards goes to the teachers in these programs. Then, we have Winthrop University Gold Cards, Teacher Cadet cards, community borrower cards, courtesy cards, faculty/staff family cards, cards for government agencies and local businesses, and, of course, cards for members of the Charlotte Area Educational Consortium. We have nothing if not cards!

I assure you that the above is only the tip of the iceberg and that each of these cards (almost all of them free) carries with it all sorts of privileges ranging from in-house and reference use of the collection to full scale circulation privileges.

Are we complaining? No, not really. Although this bewildering and growing array of cards means more work for our circulation and reference staffs, **we take pride in the fact that we are making a major contribution to the Rock Hill community** and at the same time assisting the Admissions department in exposing potential students to

the treasures in our library and to the considerable challenge of using a moderately large academic library. For many who have used only small public or rural school libraries, this is a distinct challenge and for many of these groups we have developed special library orientation programs.

We have a growing number of distance education students such as those in Clover High School who are actually "paying" Winthrop students. They have the same status as other Winthrop students and can check out as many books as they want. **If distance education grows at any rate approaching the expectations of its true believers, we may expect a rapid growth in this traffic.**

Still, this is only part of the story. Every in-house survey we have done has shown a significant number of outside adult users who have no I. D. card of any kind and we welcome them too: retirees from Westminster Towers checking their stock portfolios, a local

author researching her next novel, Rock Hill natives exploring the riches of our local history collection in Archives, businessmen and government officials making use of our outstanding federal and state documents collection, numerous “anonymous” people simply reading our newspapers and magazines for pleasure, and many, many more who regularly use our library.

Frequently, in our era of electronic communication, we see the library depicted essentially as a rather soulless and impersonal switching board

center for the accessing of digitized bits of information. We, or at least some of us, forget that the library is also a Place. . . a meeting place for a wide variety of people who use the library for an amazing spectrum of purposes ranging from reading for sheer pleasure and enlightenment to exploring the upper reaches of scholarly research.

We are here for all these groups—not because they are taxpayers (see how fast being a taxpayer will get you in free to a concert or a basketball game or the university swimming

pool!), but because we think our library is what it ideally should be, a place where all our publics make use of our collections and are guided to them by our superb librarians and staff. When this occurs we know that the library is not just a switching board but a place central and indispensable to the university enterprise and its surrounding community.

Paul Z. DuBois
Dean of Library Services

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