

The Library as an Academic Department

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THE LIBRARY AS AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT

by

A. J. EVANS

We have been talking about the developing pattern of education for the library user and it is clear that the library is becoming deeply involved with the normal teaching activities of the university rather than keeping solely to its traditional service functions. This new undertaking raises the issue of where the library fits in with the overall structure of the university, and whether it is an administrative or academic department. The question of whether senior library staff are of academic or faculty status as distinct from being purely administrative or merely senior clerical personnel has been argued for many years in several countries and is now of even greater concern in view of this increased teaching function.

We have the normal type of Library Committee structure at Loughborough in that it is a sub-committee of the University Senate although in our case, as distinct perhaps from others, it is purely advisory, and as University Librarian I am responsible directly to the Vice-Chancellor. We do however have an uncommon situation (similar in some ways to that at Queen's University, Belfast) in that I have a direct responsibility in the undergraduate course in Library Studies. As a result therefore of both this aspect and the general teaching function of the library I managed to persuade the University that the 'University Library' should sit in its own right on a School (i.e. Faculty) Board. The formation of a new School of Educational Studies came just at the right time to enable this to happen and there were no problems in its acceptance. There are, I know, representatives from the library on all faculty boards in some universities but these arrangements appear to be simply for the purpose of helping the library in its acquisitions policy.

A question often asked in connection with ancillary or service teaching is whether it should be examined and the results included in the final assessment of a student. If this is required then can members of the library staff be university examiners under the charter and statutes of the particular institution? Fulfilment of such a role might entail more rigid control of the appointment of senior library personnel so that they become in all ways equivalent to academic or faculty staff. It has also been established at Loughborough that normal academic teaching staff - for example in information science - can be part of the library establishment in addition to the traditional library personnel we have been talking about previously.

Returning to the 'examination problem', a development which is, I feel, very worthy of consideration is that of 'open book' examinations particularly in certain aspects of information science. Any development of this type once again brings the library into the more direct academic teaching environment and would strengthen the argument that I have put forward for many years that we are not just simply service or control engineers but also design engineers!

DISCUSSION

R.F. EATWELL: How do we overcome the problem of nuisance to readers when practical instruction classes are held within the library?

A.J. EVANS: This is a difficult problem unless there are small seminar type rooms available where teaching material can be placed temporarily. Anybody planning new buildings should devote considerable thought to this and other problems relating to the teaching function at a very early stage.

R.F. EATWELL: Considering the long opening hours of libraries how can the desirable 'open book' examination concept be furthered?

A.J. EVANS: Such examinations would in any case have to be held over an extended period - that is several days; the night time is always available of course!

L.J. VAN DER WOLK: How is the library accepted in the highest University circles and are the budget requirements decided over one's head?

A.J. EVANS: We have every opportunity of stating our case at all levels and financial provision is controlled in a similar manner to that for all other departments. Finance is controlled by the Establishment, Promotions and Estimates Committee consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Deans of the Schools and the Registrar, the latter normally representing the library's case. No department does in fact state its own case in the Committee but is always represented by somebody else.

R.W.P. WYATT: Does having a special relationship with one particular school make the library seem less a servant of the whole university?

A.J. EVANS: The relationship with the one school is really for a specific part of the library activities rather than the main service function. The route to other Schools is via members of the Library Committee who are appointed by the Schools, in addition to which I am invited to meetings of School Boards if special problems arise.

F. TAFT: At Case-Western Reserve University most librarians are not faculty members, and even those that are described as such do not have full faculty status. The budget is decided above the level of the librarian.