

Libraries: Symposium views alternatives to cope with too many books

Give me a library, and I'll build a university around it. — Benjamin Ide Wheeler, University of California president 1899.

Six university administrators, librarians and professors considered the advisability of central storage as an answer to the University library's shelving crisis Thursday during the library symposium.

The symposium was called to clarify the implications of remote library storage and other issues that will affect the future of the University's research library. At the present rate of new acquisitions, the library will be forced to "stack books in the aisles" three years from now unless some alternative form of storage is implemented, according to library Dean William Axford.

The University has a national reputation as one of the major research institutions in the country, but its library is comparatively small. While the University of Chicago can boast possession of the largest academic research library building in the country for a student population of 8,000 and Harvard maintains a collection of works now numbering around 10 million, the University library presently houses slightly less than 1.4 million works.

Faculty members have voiced outrage at the prospect of removing works from the library and placing them in a central storage facility. They contend that it would slow down the research process and generally reduce accessibility to the works. In addition, the facility would be shared with the other state system libraries.

State system librarians have presented the chancellor with a proposal recommending that such a remote storage facility be established at a former military base (Camp Adair) located some 50 miles north of Eugene.

Cost of the proposed Camp Adair facility is estimated at about \$400,000. Other alternatives being considered by the University include expanding the existing library, and increasing on-campus

Stories by MELODY WARD
Of the Emerald

storage without new construction.

Speakers included Frederick Jackson, director of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation of the Big Ten Universities; Gordon Williams, executive director of the Center for Research Libraries; Donald Swain, vice president for academic affairs of the University of California; John Schaefer, president of the University of Arizona; Stanley McElderry, director of the

University of Chicago library; and Warren Hollister, professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Faculty and students are encouraged to participate in an open forum session today from 9 a.m. until 12 noon in the Robinson Theatre in Villard Hall. Thursday's speakers will field questions and debate the issues facing the library with the audience.

PRO: Central storage would 'be a blessing'

An exponentially increasing rate of publication and expansion of research interests, combined with the fact that publications accumulate over time without being replaced by new ones, was cited as the major factor behind the current storage problem facing universities nationwide.

To meet the growing demand for library space, the advantages of central storage were outlined by Jackson, Williams and Swain.

"Libraries have had a goal of self-sufficiency," Williams said. "Usually the purpose of the library is thought to be to collect and keep books and periodicals."

However, Williams said that now the fundamental purpose of libraries is to provide ready access to needed materials. "It doesn't make any difference where the book is," he remarked. "What really counts is speed of access."

Bigger does not necessarily guarantee ready access Williams

added, citing Harvard study which showed that its eight million volume collection met patron needs less effectively than when it was half that size.

Reasons for the decline in effectiveness usually fall into these areas: the book is presently checked out, at the bindery, lost or stolen, or simply mis-shelved.

Williams said that patronage of the library follows a pattern in which roughly half the time, a book is not available for one of those reasons.

Universities can no longer afford to expand at the same pace as book acquisitions, according to Jackson.

He advocated central storage on the national and regional levels, at least for periodicals.

"Studies are unanimous in their conclusions that most periodicals fall into the 'little or never used' category," he said. "I think the case for a national library for books could be argued in a similar manner."

Either the Library of Congress or the Central Research Center will take on the storage of little used periodicals sometime in the near future according to Jackson.

Jackson said central storage libraries would specialize in books that get limited use and would "be a blessing" to those scholars whose research requires such works because "they would all be under one roof."

He explained that students and faculty would determine what the contents of their library would be by "the indelible record" of their usage of it.

But circulation statistics don't accurately represent library usage. "In other cases the user

simply wants to go to the library and browse," Williams said. "We actually know very little about browsing use. We need to know more — there's no question of its importance."

Scholars contend that browsing is an essential part of the research process, and wish to keep "infrequently used" books on campus for that reason. Williams admitted that browsing is probably more frequent among those titles that are not used often.

But he estimated that roughly two percent of the "browsing use" would be lost if the "infrequently used" books were in storage.

The University faces similar problems to those of the University of California campuses, according to Swain. "We are on the same track," he said. "It remains to be seen whether the light we in California see at the end of the tunnel is the light, or a freight train bearing down on us at high speed, however."

Swain said some myths about libraries were dispelled during the system-wide debate concerning the future of the UC libraries. "Just because a book is housed on campus doesn't mean it is readily accessible, even though it is supposed to be there," he cautioned.

Library policy, Swain stressed, is too important to be "left solely to librarians. Student, faculty and taxpayer interests are all involved."

Swain added that larger considerations do occasionally override local ones. "A stand-alone position is less and less defensible," he said. "Your argument to the state to expand the campus library will be strengthened if storage is in use."

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