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NOTES ON THE COLLECTIONS OF THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, 1958-78

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THIS seems an appropriate moment to examine the development of the libraries from the viewpoint of the collections, as the University Bibliographer has now been functioning for 20 years. The position was established in 1958, as the result of a report on problems of organization and service in a decentralized university (Rutgers) by John P. McDonald (though discussion as to its necessity had taken place earlier), in order to achieve integration of the collections throughout the system.

The creation of the new position as envisaged in the McDonald report was a relatively early recognition of the fact that it was becoming less and less possible for academic libraries to grow more or less haphazardly on the basis of interest and demand emanating from departments and individuals, a method which, though satisfactory in the past for accumulating the materials of scholarship, was becoming less and less so as universities grew in size and new programs, departments and schools with competing and overlapping needs were established. At Rutgers the situation was further complicated by the fact that it had become a multi-campus institution.

The geographical dispersion at Rutgers meant that collections funds inevitably made far less impact than in a single-campus institution. Expensive reference material had to be replicated, as did many journals, in addition to the more routine monographs, for instructional support.

For though quantitative growth takes place in numbers of volumes, research potential grows much more slowly than would be the case in the single-campus institution.

Such planning for the libraries as was done at that time was informal and existed chiefly in the minds of the librarian and those to whom he communicated it. Nevertheless certain principles were arrived at and became the basis for subsequent development. That they have stood the test of time demonstrates their basic soundness as subsequent events confirmed them and as written policy developed. It seems useful in view of the changes that have taken place in the larger academic libraries to trace the development of the reaction at Rutgers to these changes and perhaps to draw some conclusions for the future in so far as it is predictable.

It was early perceived at Rutgers that the traditional emphasis on building collections for the newly incorporated colleges, which were sadly underdeveloped, would have to be shifted towards developing adequate local working collections supplemented by effective means of having access to needed research material, wherever it might be, and that though a large measure of autonomy in the provision of services could continue to exist, integration of the collections was necessary in order to make the best use of the limited funds available. At the same time it was necessary in the central library to intensify the depth of the collections as well as extending their range, so that it might become, other than just in name, a research library providing, as completely as possible, access to the materials supporting scholarship and research for the whole Rutgers community. Some of these materials could be in New Brunswick but much could not.

To this end the library joined various co-operative schemes initiated by the Association of Research Libraries, such as the Farmington Plan and the Foreign Newspapers Microfilm Project in the 1950s and 1960s. The advantages of membership in the Center for Research Libraries were such that the University joined in 1970, after which time most of the largest academic libraries did so too, an admission finally that self-sufficiency in the support of research was a will o' the wisp.

As it was apparent that it was no longer possible for acquisitions librarians without specialized knowledge to select the material which was necessary to support new programs of research and instruction, often without guidance as to what long-term development of their institutions seemed to be emerging, research libraries were augmenting their staffs

with specialist subject bibliographers whose task it was to ensure that the collections supported scholarly needs and institutional objectives, and to maintain liaison with departments and faculties as they grew in numbers and increased in scope. Though early realizing the value of having these specialists, Rutgers was slower to make appointments than happened elsewhere and the corps remained small and less intensive in function than customary in the largest libraries which were the original model. For there were never sufficient resources to permit unrestrained collection building in special areas without regard to existing programs. So some of the specialists became librarians of sub-libraries as they were created (for example in Art, Music, Mathematics and East Asia). At Rutgers underutilization of these specialists is not a problem as a result of cutbacks in funding as, from the beginning, they have always had a service function in addition to their collection building activities.

During the whole period the library was subjected to periodic funding reductions and from time to time too special allocations were made in an attempt to ameliorate the general situation and to compensate in some measure for the low funding level. (For example in '77-8, a relatively 'good' year, Rutgers spent less than \$70 on library materials/fte student.) This manna from above of course could not be depended upon and though welcome, presented problems as to how best to use it, for it had to be spent within a fixed time and could not be permitted to create large new permanent commitments. The danger of spending for spending's sake had to be avoided too. The latest example, the injection of \$800,000 in special funds for 1977/8 into a budget of about \$1,837,000 disrupted planning and operations to no small extent as the relationship between book funds and the staffing levels required to handle them is not a simple matter. It is a truism that libraries are not created instantly but grow by careful nurturing over time. Fluctuating funding can be avoided by a firm commitment on the part of the university to its collections, a permanent capital resource the utility of which is greatly damaged by "stop-go" funding.

Co-operative collection development, a seemingly attractive panacea for meeting the budgetary problems of research libraries, will not be realizable until technical and organizational problems have been resolved. Some co-operation has been achieved between Rutgers and Princeton in this respect and a useful foundation laid. Much remains to be done, but significant benefits are still some years away. To pretend otherwise would be disingenuous.

While significant resources were devoted during the 60's to developing respectable working collections for the system, the expectancy, based on the erroneous notion that funding would continue to increase, grew that the collections at Newark, and to a lesser extent at Camden, should be comprehensive in nature and that a second research library should be available, recurrent budget crises in the State and fund cuts in the University notwithstanding. The growth of this "island to oneself" syndrome, even then recognized by those close to the problem as being impossible of realization even for the largest libraries, led to a statement in January 1973 by the Vice President for Academic Affairs reaffirming the position of the University not to attempt to create a second general library to support research. Nevertheless local pressures inside the University resulted in continued resistance to this necessary policy.

A second syndrome, which may be called the aping syndrome—the uncritical attempt to copy the libraries of better supported institutions by collecting large amounts of material for the sake of the scholarly world, all of which was potentially useful and the possession of which might tend to enhance prestige, without respect to programs—was resisted in the main. Instead, the development of the collections concentrated perforce upon supporting as far as possible institutional priorities where the need for support was paramount. This implied refraining from the devoting of funds to areas where there was no prior university commitment to them. Even so, the low ratio of items borrowed from, to those loaned to, other libraries gives an indicator of the services afforded by the collections to our community as well as to the larger academic world.

The over-extending of commitments during the 60s was avoided in another way. For a number of reasons the growth of book funds at Rutgers was much slower than elsewhere and could not be further drastically reduced when the cutbacks of the 70s came. Thus the dramatic effects produced at other institutions were avoided. Of course with the expansion of the Newark and Camden campuses, the foundation of new colleges in New Brunswick, the establishment of new professional schools (with a second law school library), the undertaking of support for a medical program (this last a classical example of vision in the uses of resources), the progress towards improving the collections to meet the needs of the university was inevitably slowed, a process exacerbated by the effects of inflation and dollar devaluation, which served further to reduce purchasing power.

Rutgers has been then, during the past two decades in the position—to our considerable frustration at times—at which its peers have more recently arrived. On the positive side it is apparent now that, as our resources will continue to shrink, the original approach adopted, to build an integrated collection as being the only reasonable way to best support university needs with the resources available, has resulted in the collections being in a healthier condition to adapt to the changed circumstances of the present than might have been expected. The profound changes, technological and economic, of the future will be a logical continuation.

However it has to be recognized on the other side, that whatever flexibility we had in reacting to increased demand over this time is nearing exhaustion, and that curtailment of services offered is inevitable. The results, for a clientele accustomed to increasing levels of support rather than decreasing ones, and which is in the main unaware that costs of library materials are escalating at a rate faster than the ability of the university to meet them unaided, are likely to be striking.

SOME NEEDS OF THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SYSTEM
FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE COLLECTIONS

1. A statement of university policy with respect to library support in the university's scheme of priorities is necessary, given the necessity of the libraries to respond to university requirements.
2. A committee on the university libraries should be formed to set/recommend policy. The libraries cannot stand alone in the need for a shared responsibility in maintaining them. The role of the libraries has to become increasingly politicized within the university if they are to carry out their function.
3. A basic system of resource allocation for library purposes of a part of the university's general support formula needs to be arrived at and adhered to. "Stop-go" funding is too damaging to be allowed to continue.
4. The matter of law library autonomy needs to be resolved by the university, and the full implications from the standpoint of funding the collections made clear from the outset.
5. The system of allocation of resources to branch libraries should be reexamined. Similarly allocation within the Union Library (Alex/LSM).

6. The practice of the university mandating that budget increases be used for “start-up” costs for new programs should not be continued.
7. Rutgers and Princeton—on the university level—should establish principles enabling the two institutions to acquire, and own collectively, expensive library materials. Co-operative storage might similarly be addressed.