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College Libraries—Indicted Failures: Some Reasons—and a Possible Remedy

This paper identifies some of the sources of conflict between the academic library and the teaching faculty. Although "some kinds of contention are rather easily removed," others range in seriousness to such a depth that "realistically a solution is most likely not possible." The author proposes that some of the deeper seated conflicts result from fundamental differences in competing ends held by faculty members and librarians, some result from "characterological" differences between them, and others inhere in the sometimes opposing roles the two groups are called upon to play. Examples are given.

WHEN JUDGED by the purported end, college libraries are failures. That is the only conclusion one can properly draw.

A college's goals are plural and can be expressed in diverse ways; nonetheless, the statement that students are to fall in love with books—not just to flirt or to be engaged but rather to marry until death do them part—is a fair expression of the central aim that both faculty and librarians proclaim. Occasionally a college achieves puppy love, but such a casual and immature relationship must be proclaimed a failure.¹

That the performance is dismal is enigmatic, too.

Everybody says the library is the heart of the college. Everyone is for the library. (To be against libraries is perhaps a greater sin than to be against motherhood, especially if one is in higher education.) Even college presidents who can raise money for nothing else mount

¹ The ultimate goal, of course, is not books for the sake of books, an unsublimated narcissism, but rather involves *ideas*. Pat Knapp writes that her goal is the exploitation of the reservoir of resources her library possesses. So we agree. I am only saying that books are the principal source of ideas and students must first become excited by books.

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successful campaigns for new libraries. By and large the most handsome architecture has appeared in collegiate libraries. Their physical location is often ideal. Many now have seminar rooms and faculty offices as well as generous student accommodations. Smoking and no-smoking areas, reading rooms with magazines, attractive displays of new acquisitions, accommodations for the humanities faculty (such as tapes and records), typewriters, and on and on, abound. Almost the best of all possible physical worlds exists for libraries on many campuses today. Yet, the conclusion remains—FAILURE.²

² Remarks of this flavor abound in the writings of librarians and others. *E.g.*, Ralph Perkins, director of library education, University of North Dakota, concludes in his study of over four thousand college seniors from sixty-nine colleges and universities from thirty-eight states that:

"Currently any study of *actual* use of libraries as revealed by standardized tests designed to measure such knowledge must result in an indictment of teachers; an indictment of administrators; an indictment of librarians; an indictment of those who allocate vast sums of money for buildings for libraries as they are being used today by college students." (*The Prospective Teacher's Knowledge of Library Fundamentals*. New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1965, p. 199.)

Similar findings come from the study by Guy R. Lyle, *The President, The Professor, and The College Library*. (New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1963, pp. 52-55.)

(The reader should keep in mind that it is college, not university, libraries that I am describing. The small or medium sized private liberal arts college away from a metropolitan center typifies the mode under analysis here.)

Why?

Paradoxes seldom have simple answers. What is offered here remains in the hypothetical category and merits whatever attention it might receive on the basis of the attractiveness and accuracy of the analysis that follows.³

Our approach to dilemmas takes a path we have found fruitful in the past. When the physical arrangements seem in good order and rationality apparently dominates, then experience has taught us that beneath outward equanimity may reside rather deep personal conflicts. (The persons involved most likely will be quite unconscious of the frictions.) Said once more, when stated purposes are in agreement and where the physical arrangements predict success, the hypothesis that people are at the core of the failure is worthy of pursuit.⁴

What follows, then, are arguments for the assertion that personal conflicts exist between faculty members and librarians. As was stated above, little experimental evidence exists to corroborate the analysis and thus what is advanced remains hypothetical. (It may, however, become suggestive of fruitful research.)⁵

³ I am indebted to Kenneth Vance on the faculty of the school of library science at the University of Michigan for directing me toward sources; to Donald Leatherman, education librarian at the University of Michigan for his library searching for me and for his reading of this manuscript; to Patricia Knapp, Wayne State University, for her suggestions and comments and encouragement on this effort; and to Howard Clayton, librarian at the State University of New York at Brockport, and editor of the *Library-College Journal*, for it was his invitation to reflect on this topic that initiated this inquiry.

⁴ Dan Bergen has suggested that structure (organization of facilities) and/or substance is the cause. See his "Knowledge and Library-College Integration," in Dan Bergen and E. D. Duryea (eds.), *Libraries and the College Climate of Learning*. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), p. 81. I am saying the problem is people, viz., librarians and faculty.

⁵ As reported in *Dissertation Abstracts*, Vol. 21 (October-December 1960), pp. 910-11 for Henry H. Scherer's EdD thesis at the University of Southern California, "Faculty-Librarian Relationships in Selected Liberal Arts Colleges," I may be in error. Respondents to his questionnaire agreed that harmony between librarians and faculty members was vital and that it was "good." However, there is no data to support the reported beliefs, no personality variables are analyzed, and I fear he received the "party line" response rather than reality.

Resolutions for some conflict areas will be suggested. The position taken will be that some kinds of contention are rather easily removed, that some can be mitigated by understanding and by compromise of private desire for the larger goal, and that some of the conflicts between faculty members and librarians reside at such a deep level that realistically a solution is most likely not possible.

Once again, the enigma: Why is there an unsuccessful marriage based on love between students and books when both faculty and librarians claim this as their end and when all conditions seem to make the goal inevitable?

What is claimed here is that there is human conflict and that it arises from some fundamental differences in competing *ends* held by faculty members and by librarians, that some basic *characterological* differences, both in traits as well as in ego (status) dimensions exist between professors and librarians, and that the *roles* librarians and faculty members play, possibly because of the structure of the organization in which they both work, create frictions.⁶ Let us demonstrate.

Ends—Some conflicting desires of faculty members and librarians.

Very simply put, faculty members want to own (possess) books even more than they want students to love books.

Who owns the books they want?

The librarian.

Furthermore, the librarian gets to order thousands of them every year, gets to unwrap them when they come, and is the first one to have journals and magazines in hand when they come in the mail. Faculty cannot even find time to

⁶ The categories of ends, character (or personality), and role may not be the most profitable for analysis. The demonstrations below will point to instances of some complex of these three. It is sufficient here, however, is to exhibit the conflicts, not to exhaust the possible causes. Said another way, other variables might be more fruitful for research than the ones utilized here.

read all that they want to and obviously the librarian, sitting quietly and undisturbed in her⁷ office just reads, and reads, and reads. Faculty are outright jealous; she has what faculty want most of all and what is rightfully theirs, not hers.⁸

If faculty find a high priority goal of theirs thwarted by librarians in their ownership of books, librarians harbor a deep resentment of the faculty's ownership of the students, at least of what he reads. Thus a high priority goal of the librarian is unattainable. By virtue of assignments made and not made, the professor to a large measure controls what books students touch in the library.⁹ Also, the faculty regulate to an appreciable degree what books and what journals the library will have. Librarians know better than faculty what the best books are, know better than faculty what students really should read—what is good for them and what they would like, yet can have but little impact. Furthermore, faculty teach. This other entrée into the student's mind excludes the librarian from an authoritative and influencing role. In short, librarians are understandably jealous of professors.

Thus, ends other than the common one of producing a lasting romance between students and books are in conflict

within the collegiate setting, all to the student's misfortune.

Personality—Some basic differences between faculty and librarians.

1. TRAITS: Faculty tend toward disorderliness whereas order, efficiency, economy and the like seem to be predominant in librarians.¹⁰ Librarians do not like unused books and they do like circulation figures,¹¹ again a kind of preciseness that is contrary to what faculty value highly. Then there is the predominant maleness of faculty versus the predominant femaleness of librarians and the associations these bring forth (as in, say, doctor versus nurse). Punctuality, rules and regulations—unadmirable traits in the opinion of faculty—are integrated in a librarian's life. For faculty not to get book orders in on time certainly disturbs librarians.

In summary, acts which support both faculty and librarian stereotypes only make for difficulty in cooperation.

2. EGO, OR STATUS: The librarian seems to have an inordinate passion for status. Bergen speaks of the librarian's "marginality vis-à-vis his client groups—the students and the faculty."¹² An American Library Association monograph is exclusively devoted to this question.¹³ Faculty rank seems to be a sought after goal, almost as an end in itself.

However, one can wonder what the

⁷ "She" will be the pronoun employed for "librarians" and "he" for a "faculty member" even though there are female professors and most often men occupy the highest positions in a hierarchy of a large library system. But the sex differences dominate and the stereotypes are a part of my argument. See below.

⁸ I do not think money is the fundamental issue here. I believe a faculty member (no claim for "all" is ever made or intended in this paper; only that the variable is significant, sometimes dominant), given the undetectable ability to steal and having the choice between a ten dollar bill and a three dollar book, would, if he succumbed to the temptation, opt for the book. I could find no figures on theft of books from libraries, but my guess is that on a per-capita basis faculty members steal more than students do. Librarians at the University of Michigan can show that theft increases significantly during summer sessions, the time when the enrollment proportion of teachers to students is significantly higher.

⁹ Lyle, *op. cit.*, shows that more than half the use of books in the library is done in the textbooks brought into the library by the students. (p. 55.)

¹⁰ Robert R. Douglass found that librarians "are generally orderly, conscientious, responsible, conservative, undominating, interested in people but not merely gregarious, and not neurotically anxious." (From his PhD dissertation, "The Personality of the Librarian," [University of Chicago, 1957] as reported in Nathan M. Cohen, Barbara Denison, and Jessie C. Boehlert, *Library Science Dissertations: 1925-60*. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Government Printing Office, 1963, pp. 99-100.)

¹¹ Once upon a time the librarian played a guardianship role, to never let a book be touched. But today's advocate speaks of emptying shelves every night, and it is she we are addressing. See, e.g., Kevin Guinagh, "The Academic Image of the Librarian" in Lyle's *The President, the Professor, and the College Library*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.

¹² Dan Bergen, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹³ Robert B. Downs (ed.), *The Status of American College and University Librarians*. (ACRL Monograph No. 22, Chicago: American Library Association, 1958.)

acquisition of academic rank accomplishes. Vice presidents for development sometimes possess academic titles but are not received into the society of faculty. The librarian works regular hours in a fixed locale and receives students without advance appointment. In almost all ways, the librarian is more like an administrative officer (say, registrar) and that alone excludes the librarian from the company of faculty membership, regardless of title bestowed. A faculty member cannot like an administrator, and that is what a librarian is. Furthermore, since the librarian is geographically separated from the inner and top core of the administration and also holds less power, she is particularly vulnerable to faculty wrath and abuse—as a convenient way of getting at a seemingly apparent source of discontent.

At the same time, but in quite different ways, the librarian poses an unrelenting threat to the ego of the faculty member. The professor's principal teaching device, regardless of the particular form it may appear in—lecture, quiz, lab, even in discussion or tutorial, is his authority. The faculty member holds it and the student must accept it—and usually wants to, whether he should or not. Books, of course, are a genuine threat to the faculty member's ego. Seldom does he place on his reading list books which do not support his basic beliefs.

Two events inevitably ensnare the faculty member, however. First of all, books with contrary views do infiltrate the library—from a former faculty member, a colleague, sometimes by the librarian, as "gifts." Secondly, books are authorities, especially when written by acclaimed scholars. They are genuine threats to the faculty member's ego. One can enhance his status by finding an error or a flaw in a renowned book, and they almost always have one. But the threat remains genuine. He knows that a book is as good a teacher as he is. It is much safer to keep the student out of

the library. At best, keep him busy with some reference work or reserve assignments the professor can control.

So, libraries, and hence librarians, also threaten faculty. *Ergo*, conflict.

C. *Roles*—Some carrying out of functions within the college that produce conflict between librarians and professors.¹⁴

We have already seen that faculty hold certain positions of power in the college and that librarians are in a servant role. Even when accorded academic rank, librarians are seldom on educational policy committees or on the faculty personnel committee. They even are outnumbered on the library committee and cannot prevent strains on their meager budget when faculty wish to retain subscriptions to unused journals and order multiple copies of a textbook that will be used one term for one course and thereafter waste away on precious shelf space. Faculty can transfer student wrath from themselves to the librarian for books not in the library, ones which were ordered by the professor at least two weeks ago. Professors can complain about librarians to the Dean more easily than librarians can retaliate. Ordinarily librarians cannot use the power of the Dean even to recover a book the faculty member will not return. Besides, having to send the faculty member a notice that his book is overdue, or needed by Professor Jones, or by student Smith (horror of horrors) is an act that in no way enhances the librarian's role vis-à-vis the faculty member.

So, roles cause conflict too.

Let us conclude our case that there is deep rooted conflict between faculty members and librarians by simply point-

¹⁴ Lowell E. Olson, as reported in *Dissertation Abstracts*, Vol. 27 No. 6 (December, 1966), p. 1846A. His PhD thesis at the University of Minnesota, "Teachers', Principals', and Librarians' Perception of the School Librarian's Role" set his study in role theory. However, it focuses on secondary schools and deals more with the training and status of librarians than with the concerns I focus upon here.

ing to some situations which differ from those already delineated only in that they are more complex, *i.e.*, involve simultaneous conflicts in various combinations of the categories constructed for this analysis.

That librarians are obtaining beautiful and new buildings with fine offices before faculty acquire comparable facilities can create jealousies and affect ends. That librarians keep attractively displaying all the new acquisitions the faculty member covets (and suspects the librarian is reading) certainly frustrates the overworked college faculty member. ("Information overload" seems to be the new term; the library houses this source of frustration and cause of inadequacy feeling.) That the librarian can advance irrefutable arguments about how faculty should "make students make better use of the library" only produces additional guilt feelings.

Even more complex interrelationships acting on ends, personality, and role come readily to mind. For example, faculty do not know how to find everything they want in a library. Yet faculty are supposed to know, and humiliation is involved in asking a librarian for assistance. Furthermore, to ask a librarian a question presents her with a problem (and she likes to solve mysteries) and gives her the opportunity to display how skilled she really is and how stupid professors really are. Again, the student library assignment that stipulates no assistance from the librarian—a task defended on the grounds that a student must acquire library skills (a legitimate goal)—may in fact be a protective device on the part of the faculty member so as to not allow a librarian to reveal to a student what could actually be learned in such a building. (Furthermore, if students could really use libraries they might discover all kinds of things—arguments faculty cannot counter, books they have not read, . . .)

The reader will quickly supply many

more illustrations to support our contention that for understandable reasons faculty and librarians have genuine (though most often unexpressed) conflicts.¹⁵ Furthermore, we no longer are surprised that collegiate libraries fail so grandiosely, that they do so little in contrast to what "everyone knows" they could and should accomplish.

What might be done?

What conflicts can be removed? Which can be mitigated? Which can be solved by transposing them? How?

Our sagacity at this juncture is rather meager. We can only offer a few suggestions, hoping them to be "good" and trusting that what we have presented will be suggestive to others. We have a consummate faith in the ingenuity of librarians and faculty to solve problems.

When we take stock, we are encouraged by a solution already in existence, though we suspect the incident may be accidental. A typical library rule is for the user (say, a professor) not to reshelve the books he has strewn across the table. The librarian no doubt has established this regulation because faculty make errors in reshelving and thereby produce more headaches and time loss than by having a library assistant perform the task. Fine. The faculty member can relish the disorder he cherishes and the librarian can achieve the order she wishes. So, one solution serves diverse, even conflicting, wishes. No doubt there are others, but they do not deluge us.

¹⁵ See, for example, Patricia B. Knapp, "The College Librarian: Sociology of a Professional Specialization," in Robert B. Downs (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 56-65, and her *An Experiment in Coordination Between Teaching and Library Staff for Changing Use of University Library Resources* (Detroit: Monteith College, Wayne State University, 1964). The latter mammoth study, as exciting as it was enterprising, must in the end be judged a failure. Despite herculean efforts and funds, the librarian, Pat Knapp, was not fully accepted by a faculty who theoretically were the most receptive audience she could expect, and the use of the library by students remains but a fraction of its desired potential. Also, see her *College Teaching and the College Library*, ACRL Monograph No. 23, 1959 (Chicago: American Library Association), pp. 94-95 support the statements made regarding faculty ignorance.

But what can we create to make students fall in love with books? Patricia Knapp entertained the notion of having a coffee shop nearby.¹⁶ Our idea is different, but related.

Besides librarians and faculty members we find that proprietors of bookshops love books and love to own and possess books. The small shop, the one with some unusual titles from small presses, with paperbacks enticingly displayed, is particularly attractive and may very well have a profound impact on a student buying (falling in love with) books. A certain amount of casualness, even sloppiness, a librarian would certainly say, and the bearded man add to the atmosphere; so does his trust that one will respect his treasures.

Our basic suggestion, then, is to move the bookstore into the library—literally. The library cannot sell its possessions directly, but it could be the best bookstore in the entire world in displaying the titles available. All the library needs to add is an order desk. The student and faculty member simply fill out proper forms (or better, speak the order into a recording device), the library sends it off and notifies the purchaser when his package arrives.

And we would take advantage of other successful merchandizing techniques (if you will excuse the crassness of the term). Everyone would have a charge card. As an automatic part of his contract the faculty member would have a credit of \$100 each September.¹⁷ If the business manager insists, students might have to pay in advance and have a credit of \times dollars on their charge ticket.

We also would greatly capitalize on

photoduplication services. Rather than simply having the machine available and working for a quarter, or whatever, we would have spaces on the student fee card that would automatically give him \$10 worth of duplication service. The faculty would have a greater allotment. (As for the college's expense, they might well be cheaper than having a journal stolen and/or pages torn from a magazine so as to obtain one article.¹⁸ Most people want just a small part of a book or an article for their personal possession and use. See that they can obtain (and *own*) it, fast and cheap.

In this same category an extra catalog card could be ordered for each new addition, the additional one simply being handed to the faculty member who ordered the book. Then he would have an already completed card for his file index and might even feel he has an intimate relationship (approaching ownership) with that book.

We could go on with our bookstore-library notion, but perhaps enough has been said to suggest that such an operation could well throw librarians and faculty and students together with books and their contents. (Female librarians cannot grow beards, we know; but they could more often have long, straight hair, leotards, and miniskirts.) The ends of all parties would stand a much greater chance of attainment. The library could take the proper credit for the total "through-put" of books—borrowed, bought, and reproduced, a much better measure of the intellectual climate of the college than the numerical count of the bodies that went through the front door each day or of the number of volumes checked out.

Our device has not solved some of the conflict areas, for it has not changed

¹⁶ Patricia Knapp, "Involving the Library in an Integrated Learning Environment," in Bergen and Duryea (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 29. Coffee in the library would be lovely, but frightening. Coffee spills; it even has a propensity for cherished books.

¹⁷ One might learn from book salesmen. They take valuable faculty time, and have the goal of obtaining adoptions (selling) and soliciting manuscripts. Yet they are tolerated, for they send "samples."

¹⁸ Reproduction and copyright problems cannot be considered here, although it is recognized that there are vital issues requiring resolution. Also, the student who will steal a page from a journal or a book so that his classmates will suffer on a forthcoming examination is a different problem, one not solved by our suggestion.

deep rooted personality differences. This arrangement would still not allow a librarian to teach a faculty member how to use a library without insulting him—but he might ask now, if he spends more time there, for he likes the bookstore aspect anyhow, especially the credit for free books. If librarians have a genuine fixation about order, our idea may be more disturbing than they can tolerate. (Our arrangement might attract to the profession people who now avoid it.¹⁹) The authority role with regard to knowledge the faculty member now assumes would be greatly threatened; he may

not be able to adjust his ego and return to the status of fellow learner. And there would be other difficulties, we are sure.

We are basically optimists. We believe people can change, and we have an unshakable faith in the power of books. Manipulating a situation does not seem immoral to us when our goal is a confrontation all parties sincerely desire and when the activity, the wedding of ideas (as found in print) with people—librarians, students, and faculty—would be much better facilitated by enticing them together. We would even feel a little proud if we helped change the cliché, “the library is the heart of the college,” from a pious platitude to a concrete reality. ■ ■

¹⁹ Margaret Bennett (pseudonyms for two librarians) “DON’T Give Us Your Tired, Your Poor,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1965.

