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Guide to Methods of Library Evaluation

JULY 7, 1968

THIS DOCUMENT is designed as an aid in judging the adequacy of an academic library. It is organized into sections of descending importance:

- I. *Prime evidence*: books, reading spaces, and professional staff.
- II. *Secondary evidence*: such as budget and planning documents.
- III. *Special activities suggesting excellence*: such as a student book club and publications.

Since books, space, and staff constitute the ingredients which can make any library great, there often will be no need to document or consider the points of "secondary evidence" or the "special activities." Local circumstances will determine the advisability of using these subordinate data to clarify evaluation.

In applying these evaluation methods to the well established library, it is important to watch for danger signs where the library may be slipping in one or another index, or is failing to meet new conditions posed by evolving instructional or research patterns and practices.

In applying these methods to a library which has not yet established its quality, it is emphasized that the most important condition is a strong rate of improvement; the mere fact of meeting minimum quantitative standards is of far less importance.

Various sets of minimum standards exist and can be discriminatingly applied in library evaluation. These have been established by the

Association of College and Research Libraries,¹ the several regional accrediting associations, and a large number of professional associations;² this guide does not contradict any of these; it does not purport to set standards. Rather it suggests the methods for judging the library program for any institution of higher education. In the course of such judgment, standards can be of use in threshold cases; yet, even for these libraries, the momentum of library development and the effectiveness made of available resources is of far greater significance than is sole reliance on quantitative data. The published ranges of actual library statistics may also serve as benchmarks.³

I. PRIME EVIDENCE

All three of these must be adequate for the clientele and its program. Otherwise no library can be judged to be satisfactory, no matter what other activities or qualities it may offer.

A. Books and related materials.

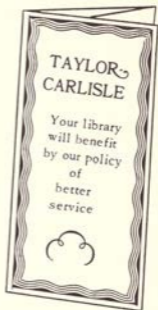
In evaluating the collections, there must be

¹ "Standards for College Libraries," *College and Research Libraries*, vol. 20 (July 1959) p. 274-280. "Standards for Junior College Libraries," *College and Research Libraries*, vol. 21 (May 1960), p. 200-206.

² Standards for the six regions and twenty-one professional associations were compiled as *College and University Library Accreditation Standards—1957*, Chicago, Association of College and Research Libraries, 1958, 46p. ACRL Monograph, no. 20.

³ *Library Statistics of College and Universities: Institutional Data*, annual publication of the U.S. Office of Education.

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discrimination among subject fields and some attention paid to needs of individual courses.

The full scope of course and research interests must be covered by good books, both as to chronological periods and degrees of subject specificity, including primary and secondary works and a fair quantity of collateral and even minor works in the major fields.

There must also be a reasonable quantity of books, including duplicate copies of heavily used titles, and there must be particular relevance of these books to the range and level of the curricula offered.

The currency of the collections must be maintained; that is, a substantial and continuing infusion of new books discriminately selected must be in evidence in each field.

Finally, the physical condition of the collection must be adequate to assure its availability for the next generations of students, especially in bibliographies, reference works, primary sources, and journals.

Evaluation Method. Use select lists to check on thoroughness of coverage. Ask a few specialists to spot check various areas in their field and ask various faculty members about the adequacy of the collections in their fields. (These first two techniques will be of no appreciable value in a library far beyond meeting any minimum quantitative standards, yet even in these libraries these techniques may be applied in the fields of newly established departments or new graduate programs.)

Ask a sampling of students about their ease in obtaining sources. Check titles on the "new books shelf" or on the shelves of new receipts in the acquisitions department. Check through part of the outstanding order file for scope, range, and currency for various fields. Inspect the "standing order" file, and such desiderata lists as may exist; and review some titles on outgoing interlibrary loan requests to get a feel for requested material that is lacking in the collections. Read any recent self-study or report by a consultant on the state of the collections. Sample the bindings or other preservation treatment given the collection, including microfilms, by visiting various parts of the library.

B. Reading Spaces.

The library (including departmental libraries) must be located on campus in a convenient place so that trips from classes or dormitories or commuter's parking do not discourage library use.

It must be open adequate hours to meet needs, including weekends; and all major de-

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