



Personnel and the Library School

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THERE ARE NO aspects of library education which do not have implications of greater or lesser significance to the larger subject of library personnel. In examining the rather considerable accumulation of literature devoted to professional training, however, one cannot but be struck forcefully by its theoretical and idealistic approach and by the lack of realistic measurement of the components and product of professional training. Expressed in other terms, our preoccupation seems to be invariably directed toward newer recruitment programs, new academic devices, new curriculums, and almost never toward a scientific and practical exposure of the student recruit, the resources of faculty and instruction made available to him, and the processes through which he is eventually assimilated into the profession.

By way of illustration, the literature is barren as far as any examination of the kind of person who, as a library school recruit, will in due course materialize into a personnel recruit. Is he mature? Is his foundation education adequate? Is librarianship his first vocational choice, or was it simply an expedient second or third choice? Is he psychologically and physically a promising candidate for a profession where success is uniquely balanced between scholarship and human leadership? The answers to such questions would obviously enable the profession to make better use of the recruit, as well as provide the foundations upon which any sound recruitment program is built.

The qualifications of our existing teachers, the provisions which exist to enable them to maintain a realistic liaison with the working profession through sabbatical leaves and internships are subjects which are of direct concern to the library employer but remain subjects which have strangely been left uninvestigated. With almost as many curricular approaches to librarianship as there are library schools, there has been little attention given by the profession to measuring just what

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the common content of such varied curriculums may be and what its values are in terms of employment.

Questions such as the foregoing ones are illustrative of the need for realistic, scholarly investigations of the facts that underlie library education, facts which, when exposed, cannot but have significant and constructive implications. In their absence and in the compass of a short article it is impossible to go beyond three or four of the larger aspects of professional education which are of especial relevance to the subject of personnel.

The pattern of library education for the past decade has been one of considerable flux. This has been due, in part, to far-reaching attempts at curricular restatements toward the end of bringing education for librarianship into closer line with the changing objectives and needs of the employing profession. Studies such as those of J. P. Danton,¹ Joseph L. Wheeler,² Bernard Berelson,³ Harold Lancour,⁴ and Robert D. Leigh⁵ sparked interest in new philosophical approaches to library education that were explored further in the meetings of the various national library associations and through many special conferences throughout the country. Other factors which were responsible for change were of a less voluntary nature. They included problems in recruitment of students to meet great shortages of trained library personnel, difficulties in applying accrediting standards, and fiscal problems of schools in relation to standards and services.

The relationship of library education to library personnel is in three principal directions. While perhaps not directly responsible for recruitment, the school of library science has an inescapable relationship with, and responsibility for, both the recruitment and selection of new professional personnel. Second, the educational philosophy of the school, together with its resources to implement that philosophy, is highly determinant in the quality of professional training of new personnel for the profession. Finally, the processes of placement of the recent graduate and the placement guidance of the less recent graduate have a direct relationship to the personnel situation of every employing library. While it may be safe to say that very considerable gains have been made in the past decade in professional education itself, the areas of recruitment and placement are characterized by problems which are still critical and which are largely unsolved.

Until perhaps a decade ago library education was largely in the hands of those schools accredited by the Board of Education for Librarianship of the American Library Association. The Board maintained standards for library education and enforced those standards

Personnel and the Library School

through visitations and reports. Through it the library employer was able to obtain considerable information about specific schools, and could also exert considerable influence on professional education. "Graduation from an accredited library school" became a qualifying device for most civil service, certification, and institutional personnel systems. Likewise, the accredited list was a useful guide for the recruit to the profession.

The list of such accredited schools now numbers thirty-eight institutions which are providing roughly 1,500 graduates to the profession each year. New Board of Education for Librarianship standards adopted in 1951 call for consideration of only graduate programs for accreditation. While this may be a factor in reducing the list during the present three-year program of evaluative visits, it is probable that the admission of previously unaccredited schools will offset the number which may be dropped.

It is a mistake, however, to consider the training of professional library personnel in terms of only the accredited schools. According to statistics provided by the United States Office of Education some 559 institutions of higher learning in this country offer training in library science, 214 of which offer programs exceeding twelve semester hours of work. The number of "trained" recruits which such institutions provide the library field is not known, but it would seem safe to guess that the number exceeds that of schools accredited by the Board of Education for Librarianship, perhaps by several times. The unaccredited department or school reached its present numerical strength immediately after World War II not only to meet shortages of library personnel in elementary and secondary schools, but also to meet the personnel needs of public, college, university, and even special libraries.

While very little information is available about unaccredited institutions, their influence and significance for the employing profession is becoming quite visible. The Board of Education for Librarianship has virtually no control over or communication with them. From the number of institutions involved, it is certain that standards of admission and instruction may vary from acceptable to completely unacceptable levels. Some state certification boards, government personnel agencies, notably the United States Armed Forces, and individual institutional personnel classification structures have modified their qualifications to admit graduates of unaccredited schools to full professional status. Perhaps most important of all has been the effect of the unaccredited school on recruitment, for frequently its graduates

discover that they may obtain eligibility for the status they desire only by virtually beginning their training again from scratch at schools on the accredited list.

The effect of the unaccredited institution upon the accredited school is even more marked. The statistics already cited indicate an average student body of less than forty among the accredited schools, a figure far below the minimum number of students required by any graduate school or department to justify an adequate budget, faculty, and other resources necessary to provide reasonable standards. While poor recruiting on the part of the profession may account for low enrollment in accredited schools, it is not unlikely that competition for students with the larger number of unaccredited institutions may also be an effective factor. That enrollment far below capacity may eventually affect standards of admission and quality of faculty and instruction is probably an unescapable conclusion.

It is paradoxical that the recent thinking of the profession with regard to library education has tended toward the point of view that the number of accredited library schools should be reduced to a point where there could be reasonable assurance for an enrollment of sufficient size in all schools to justify the highest standards of instruction and faculty. Leigh suggested that the thirty-six schools on the accredited list in 1949 be cut to twelve or fifteen.⁶ The profession has in fact, by inactivity, allowed a professional situation to develop wherein it has little information and, as a profession, virtually no control. The recent coming into being of the National Commission on Accrediting, just as the Board of Education for Librarianship was beginning to activate a stronger program, further complicates the situation. The Commission has indicated that it intends to move toward the accreditation of total institutions by regional associations. Should the Commission realize this objective, it may be difficult for the library profession to influence or prescribe standards for professional education or to obtain collective information about the hundreds of institutions on which it must depend for its trained personnel.

The shortage of trained recruits to meet library needs has been one of the recurring issues of the profession since World War II—especially, as it has been noted, in view of low enrollments in schools of library science. Recruitment has been the responsibility of committees of most of the national, regional, and state library associations, most notably of the Joint Committee on Library Work as a Career, which came into existence soon after the conclusion of the war and is sponsored by all of the major professional library associations. As a result

Personnel and the Library School

of such activities there appeared many recruitment pamphlets, posters, and leaflets describing the profession as a vocational possibility for high school and college students, and sporadic attempts were made to orient vocational advisers and even to communicate directly with groups of students in colleges and schools. However substantial these efforts were, the results have been far from adequate either to meet the needs of the profession or the minimum enrollment requirements of accredited library schools.

In an effort to explore the recruiting process the Committee on Recruiting and Personnel of the Association of American Library Schools attempted to reach all students enrolled during the 1951-52 academic year in accredited schools of library science through a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire and study ⁷ which ensued was to determine what factors attracted students to library training that particular year. Of the 1,200 students replying to the questionnaire, 38 per cent attributed their choice of a career to the influence of a particular librarian, 19 per cent to their experience of working in libraries, and 10 per cent to their use or observation of libraries. Only 10 per cent indicated that they had been influenced by, or had even seen, any printed recruitment literature. The study would seem to indicate that past recruitment activities of the profession have been inadequate and in the wrong directions. While the preparation of a pamphlet or poster may be more quickly and psychologically satisfying to a committee, it seems evident that recruitment activities will not meet with great success until they take into account and effectively stimulate the responsibility of the individual member of the profession for recruitment.

The most obvious change in the pattern of library education has been the shift during the past eight years from the fifth-year post-graduate program resulting in a second baccalaureate to the graduate fifth-year program resulting in a master's degree. The recent change of policy on the part of the Board of Education for Librarianship to consider only programs at the graduate level for accreditation purposes indicates that the new graduate standard will be woven into the fabric of certification systems, civil service and merit systems, and many individual institutional personnel classification plans. Although the change of the fifth-year programs from the undergraduate to the graduate level may represent in part only the correction of an academic inequity, any study of the period in which this process occurred indicates that it was accompanied by curricular changes of some profundity. Perhaps most important of all was the opportunity for

each library school to examine the objectives of library education anew, and to experiment with its own curricular interpretations of those objectives. That this occurred is evident in the variations of program and differences in philosophical approach that are recognizable in the curriculums of the accredited schools today. The relationship of undergraduate preparation to the graduate degree, the importance of research in the first-year program, standards for admission to the graduate year, the dimensions of core programs—all are typical of problems which have many varied expressions in existing schools, and which probably will not find common solution until the schools have had further experience and time for experimentation, and until the employing profession is able to make evaluations in terms of the graduates it has employed.

Perhaps the principal gain that is already discernible from the curricular changes since World War II is in the emergence of the more general approach to library education rather than the specialized program. Special programs for children's librarians, catalogers, reference service, school library service, and so on, in which the student became "typed" not only in his own mind but through the processes of placement and employment, have tended to disappear. Too frequently the student who prepared himself in a specialty, such as work with children, found that in the placement process another far different specialization, such as reference work, was more suitable and attractive. Too frequently, also, the person who might have been eminently suitable for one kind of position was passed over because, through specialization in the library school, he had become irrevocably identified with some other particular area of librarianship. The disappearance of the specialized program in favor of the general program follows naturally from the increasing tendency in library education to minimize the techniques and skills in favor of a more philosophical and theoretical approach to librarianship and the disciplines to which it is basically related, and upon which it depends.

Meanwhile, for the student needing it, the opportunity for specialist training is increasingly being provided by flexibility of programs to meet individual interests and needs. Some schools have undertaken joint programs with adjacent university departments and schools so that instruction may be provided jointly by the school of library science and the faculties of business, music, fine arts, science, or law. More important, a survey of library school catalogs will indicate that even when such joint programs have not been formally developed there are few instances among the stronger schools where courses

Personnel and the Library School

related to the individual student's objectives may not be taken outside the library school, and there is an increasing tendency to bring instructors from other academic areas into the library school program.

Perhaps because of their more obvious relation to subject fields, the research librarian and the special librarian have seemed to have had undue attention, one way or another, as compared to the public librarian who frequently succeeds or fails in terms of his understanding of the people he deals with rather than his mastery of the subject. The importance of strong preparation in the social sciences—especially psychology, sociology, and education—for the public librarian, whose fundamental problem is one of understanding, guiding, leading, and communicating with human beings, has not been sufficiently emphasized.

It is both natural and appropriate that there be a relation between the kind of professional education offered in library schools and the kind of professional training that library employers look for in the graduates that seek to join their staffs. The late Pierce Butler in discussing professional training for catalogers pointed out very clearly a historical dilemma of library education when he indicated that the school could produce "a person who on being hired and assigned any job whatever in a library could hang up his hat and sit down to work just as fast and just as effectively as any departmental veteran," or a person who is able not merely "to see the library as a whole, but to see it as an essential component of civilization."⁸ This dilemma is not merely one in which the professional educator has been historically castigated, but a very present one that may simply be an inevitable characteristic of librarianship. As rapidly as professional and non-professional functions are separated in libraries, as rapidly as the specialist functions of the librarian emerge in library positions, as rapidly as the profession emphasizes leadership and imagination rather than skill, those distinctions will be reflected in professional education through admissions standards, curriculum, and instruction. On the other hand, as long as employing libraries fail to move in those directions recruitment, admission standards, and instruction—and the graduate who is the present product of them—will tend to be in technical rather than professional terms.

Library placement is discussed in full on pages 22-31 in this issue. Suffice it to say here that library schools have a long tradition not only for counseling and placing their current graduates, but also for providing extensively for their less recent graduates. The costs of placement personnel, the maintenance of adequate files of up-to-date in-

formation, and the extensive correspondence involved, all are items which appear as charges on most library school budgets.

The absence of any kind of general national placement service has placed the burden upon schools of library science which by their very nature are not equipped to provide the services which are needed. Both from the employer's as well as the school's standpoint the placement processes for each position which is available must be repeated for each of the thirty-eight schools on the accredited list. It is clear that this repetition may have greatly exaggerated the need expressed since the last war for trained and experienced personnel. Certainly it has left the school with an undue and costly burden for the placement of the experienced graduate, and for seeking candidates for the position which requires careful evaluation of experience after graduation.

It should be said that certain responsibilities for placement on the part of the library school are desirable or are, in any case, inescapable. The relationship of placement of current graduates to recruitment of students is one which schools must view realistically. The importance of successful choice of a first position is one for which most schools devote long and careful orientation, and which few would wish to delegate to an outside agency. On the other hand, the tightening fiscal pressures upon colleges and universities are producing strong pressures in turn upon the schools to decrease the extent of placement services and their costs. Except for initial placement of graduates, placement is primarily a matter of interest for employers and applicants, and there is perhaps real justification in the increasing feeling that the costs and burden of such services should be borne by those parties rather than by an institution whose identity and responsibility are primarily educational.

Finally, it should be noted that the rapidly increasing tendency for placement through competitive or evaluative examinations has added to the complexity of the placement process—especially the placement of current graduates of library schools. With the increasing requirement of examinations by state and national civil service agencies, state certification boards, and individual libraries it is frequently necessary for the recent graduate to arrange to compete in six or more examinations in order to be considered for positions for which he might wish to be an applicant. Since an interview subsequent to examination is also a frequent requirement, examination as a personnel device falls of its own weight.

It seems clear that the library profession is in need of new machinery for personnel evaluation. There is increased recruitment from

Personnel and the Library School

new and unaccredited institutions for which evaluative machinery is lacking. Library schools vary radically in both their objectives and curricular philosophies. Certification standards and, more important, the enforcement of those standards, vary greatly from state to state. Evaluation through examination by individual agencies tends to defeat the very purposes which such examinations are designed to serve. It may soon be time for the library profession to consider other devices such as national examination of library school graduates and national certification—devices which have long been successfully employed by sister professions.

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