



Statistical Reporting of American Library Developments by the Federal Government

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NEARLY ONE CENTURY elapsed between the establishment of the first college library at Harvard in 1639 and the inauguration in 1731 of the first subscription library in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin.¹ A period about one and one-half times as long passed until the beginning of the official collection of library statistics in 1870. Nongovernmental compilations of library data appear in publications, of which *Trübner's Bibliographical Guide to American Literature*² may be among the earliest. However, the precise date of the first presentation of such data has not been ascertained.³

THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION: 1867-1965

The official collection of educational statistics started in the United States on March 2, 1867, when President Andrew Johnson signed the Organic Act which established the U.S. Office of Education (USOE). This basic law states in Section 1 that:

There shall be established, at the city of Washington, a department of education, for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several states and territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods of teaching, as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country.⁴

The role of the newly created agency—to collect statistics and other educational information—was complicated by the fact that the U.S.

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Constitution gives authority for education to the states; consequently, each state had developed its own system of education and its own methods to deal with its educational problems and to collect whatever data seemed necessary. This condition of state education responsibilities, however, did not prevent the Organic Act from defining the duties of the agency's chief administrative officer, the Commissioner of Education:

Section 3. It shall be the duty of the Commissioner of Education to present annually to the Congress a report embodying the results of his investigations and labors, together with a statement of such facts and recommendations as will, in his judgment, subserve the purpose for which this department is established.⁵

After less than two years of its existence, the agency's name was changed by Congressional appropriation to the Bureau of Education. Sixty years later, in 1930, the original name Office of Education was reinstated. In 1939 the office was transferred to the Federal Security Agency; in 1953 this agency was reorganized as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare with the Office of Education as one of its agencies.⁶

Henry Barnard, the first Commissioner of Education, started immediately on his assigned tasks with a staff of three clerks to collect statistical information on various aspects of education: (1) the number and condition of all types of schools (elementary, secondary, public and private, higher and professional as well as those for Negroes, the handicapped, orphans, prisoners and Sunday schools); (2) teachers, teacher training, teaching conditions and teaching requirements; and (3) status and functions of school libraries. As a result, the reports of the Commissioners of Education contained from the outset some statistical data about school libraries and later other types of libraries.⁷

The collection and dissemination of educational statistics initiated by Henry Barnard was continued after his resignation in 1870 by John Eaton, an appointee of President Grant and former State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee. Eaton was as dedicated to education and statistics as Barnard, stressing throughout his career the words of the enabling act: "to promote the cause of education."

In order to standardize the collection and reporting of statistics, a standard form for public school financial statistics was developed in 1910. In 1912 the office published the *Report of the Committee on Uniform Records and Reports*.⁸ Similar reports were published in 1928,

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1940, 1953, 1957, and 1959. The statistical functions of the office were reviewed over the years, with the three most recent reports published in 1946, 1957, and 1960.⁹ These reports included two basic and recurring problems: (1) the need for expansion of the office and its impact on statistical operations, and (2) the development of equipment and techniques which will affect future data collections and their dissemination.¹⁰

EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS: 1965-1975

In 1965 the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) was created by administrative action of the Office of Education to serve as its statistical arm. Its function was to gather and disseminate information on the condition and progress of education in the United States; this mission included a library statistics program which was taken over from USOE's Library Services Division and organized into the Library Surveys Branch.

The Educational Amendments Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-380, enacted August 21, 1974) redefined the mission of NCES and required several mandated reports. In addition to data collection and dissemination, requirements were established regarding the analysis of the meaning of educational data, international statistics, and the assistance to state and local agencies for improving and automating statistical data collection activities. NCES is currently one of the six major national statistics centers in the federal government.¹¹

Organizationally, the center was placed in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Education. Also created was an Advisory Council on Education Statistics, to be composed of seven members appointed by the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and four *ex officio* members consisting of the Commissioner of Education, the Director of the National Institute of Education, the Director of the Census Bureau, and the Commissioner of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor.

Recent NCES programs to improve data accessibility include the early release procedures of important national data prior to the final publication. The first example of this for library statistics was the release of the 1975 College and University Library Survey on December 24, 1975. The NCES Reference Services, which answers over 10,000 inquiries each year, also prepares an annual *Digest of Educational Statistics*, covering American education from the kindergarten level through graduate school. The branch also provides ten-year

projections of the most important national educational statistics in the annual *Projections of Educational Statistics*. Both of these publications contain some statistical tabulations and projections of library data.

The Condition of Education, a new annual publication of the center, presents statistics about education in an output-oriented framework. Its intent is to link educational outcomes to more general societal characteristics and trends, and to show the links among levels of the educational process and types of educational experiences available to the youth and adult populations.

The Remote-Access Educational Data Base (EDSTAT) system was established in fiscal year 1974. It is a major means of increasing the timeliness and accessibility of data using a time-sharing computer system which permits users of standard keyboard terminals in the continental United States to interrogate, on-line, a large data bank of educational statistics. This development may be of particular interest to the newly developing library cooperatives, consortia, networks and state libraries in the larger states. Some library data are now available on EDSTAT.

THE LIBRARY STATISTICS PROGRAM: 1867-1976

The first official library statistics publication appeared in 1870 in *The Report of the Commissioner of Education made to the Secretary of Interior for the Year 1870*. This document contains a table entitled "Principal Libraries of the United States, Exclusive of Those Connected with Colleges, etc."¹² This listing of 161 libraries supplies the library's name, location, date of founding, number of volumes and annual acquisitions increases. Commissioner John Eaton, in his report of October 27, 1870, indicates that "less than eight months have elapsed since I entered upon the duties of this office."¹³ Apparently his is the second report, because he states that the "small edition of the only report which had been published by the Department was soon exhausted."¹⁴ Commissioner Eaton recommended in his report "that increased means be furnished for the publication of facts, statistics, and discussions, to meet the constantly increasing demand."¹⁵

Eventually funds were made available; by 1876, the first official report on libraries was issued. Government statistics on libraries, now published for more than a century, afford the opportunity for retrospection. The library statistics century can be divided into four periods.

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EXPLORATORY PHASE: 1870-1937

During this period surveys were conducted intermittently. There was no organizational unit within the USOE specifically responsible for library data. In 1880, Melvil Dewey discussed with Eaton the appointment of a library officer who would devote his attention to general library interests, but no specific action was taken for the next thirty-nine years. Statistics on public, school and society libraries were published with some regularity. In 1919, legislation was introduced in Congress to create a separate library unit, but not until 1937 did Congress actually appropriate funds for the Library Services Division in the Office of Education.

DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE: 1938-1956

During the next eighteen years, Ralph Dunbar (who directed the Library Services Branch until 1957) established a pattern of library statistics which resulted in separate nationwide surveys on public, college and university, and school libraries. Twelve nationwide studies were conducted (four in each of the three fields) at intervals of five, six, or seven years; the six-year cycle was most common. In addition, shorter annual surveys were developed which dealt with a very limited number of data items or covered a segment of the respective survey universe. For example, surveys were occasionally conducted of not all public libraries, but only of those serving communities of 100,000 population and more.

BROADENED RESPONSIBILITIES: 1956-1965

In 1956, when the Library Services Act was passed by Congress and the responsibilities of the Library Services Branch under the direction of John G. Lorenz were substantially expanded, its staff increased correspondingly. In 1958, the staff was divided into the legislative and basic research programs. By 1965, twenty-seven staff members were assigned to the basic research program, dividing their time fairly evenly between statistical surveys and consultant and advisory work for all segments of librarianship and information activities.

Academic library surveys became annual studies, and analytic reports of these surveys were published every two years. Public library surveys approached a four-year cycle. Studies regarding library education programs and surveys of special libraries serving state governments and the federal government were initiated. During this period

expanded coverage and increased data elements provided more meaningful information for congressional and executive action, budget considerations and related purposes. The American Library Association and the Special Library Association expanded existing statistics committees and created additional ones which have given valuable advice on plans and programs. They were also responsible for initiating new surveys and survey components. In cooperation with these groups, the *Library Statistics Handbook* was developed and published by the American Library Association in 1966.¹⁶ During these years the responsibility of all statistical surveys about libraries was located in the Library Services Branch. Since the early 1960s, assistance regarding the development of survey instruments and data tabulation presentation was provided by the staff members of the Division of Educational Statistics of the USOE.

DIVERSIFIED RESPONSIBILITIES: 1965-1975

In 1965 the U.S. Office of Education was reorganized. All statistical operations were combined in the newly formed National Center for Educational Statistics and separated from various Office of Education grant and research programs. The staff responsible for library statistics was reduced from a full-time equivalent of about 13.5 positions to three positions. Between the end of 1965 and the end of 1967, most survey activities were slowed down or changed into new formats. In June 1966, a National Conference on Library Statistics was cosponsored by the American Library Association and NCES. Between 1967 and 1970 the Library Surveys Branch was organized with the staff of four professionals and two support staff members. During this period, the first extramural contracts were developed. Previously, work consisted of conducting surveys as in-house efforts. During the last five years, contracting for statistical projects has become standard operational procedure. For this purpose NCES staff prepares requests for proposals which are announced in the publication "Commerce Business Daily."

During 1973-74 two new projects were developed in close cooperation with the Federal Library Committee of the Library of Congress and the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor. These projects resulted in a complete survey of federal libraries¹⁷ and an extensive study of library manpower.¹⁸

As of December 1975, a national public library survey and a national school library/media center survey, both for 1974, were completed in eighteen months. The 1975 academic library survey

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with institutional data was completed in three months; the analytic report is to follow about six months later. During 1976, surveys are to be started for special libraries in commerce and industry, in state libraries and state library agencies. In addition, a new survey of library cooperatives, consortia and networks will be initiated as the first multi-type library survey, including academic, public, state and special libraries. The following year will probably witness a return to surveys of the basic type libraries (academic, public and school).

A glance at the recent past, present, and near future of library surveys indicates an alternate pattern between basic type surveys (academic, public and school), and special and experimental surveys. The three surveys for 1974-75 yielded data more quickly than any previously conducted library survey. Among the reasons for this increased efficiency are the following factors:

1. Substantial pretesting of data items and extensive planning is done before surveys are actually started.
2. The development of the LIBGIS (Library General Information Survey) data system has been essential. LIBGIS is based on close cooperation with relevant state education and state library agencies in the data collection and pre-editing cycles.
3. The use of a standardized library statistics terminology and "core" items (which are identical for all library surveys and are to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future) has been accepted by the respondents. It should be noted, however, that a limited number of new data items, unique for each type of survey, will be part of every survey.
4. Experience over the last few years has produced a methodology which combines work done by in-house staff and contractors who use computerized equipment and engage in hand- and machine-editing to produce machine tabulations.

This program and its new technological aspects and speedier data delivery indicate that in spite of the current economic uncertainties, recent library statistics have placed library planning on bases that are firmer and more expanded than were available in the preceding century. This information will allow the nation's libraries and information and resource centers a more adequate balancing of their financial resources with staff, information materials, and data bases. This in turn will enable them to provide adequate service for its expanding groups of users.

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