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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes the principal recommendations of the Research Library Committee of the Council on Library Resources regarding library response to the rapid transformation brought about by integrated information technologies, rising costs, and the growth in the amount of information available. Central issues for research libraries are identified, including how the university can determine and maintain a balance in library services, realistic expectations for interinstitutional cooperation, the requirements of multidisciplinary research, and the library's responsibility for electronic information. Recommendations in the following areas are offered: (1) the relationship of the Library of Congress to other national collections; (2) collaboration between libraries; (3) scholarly communications; (4) the library in the university structure; (5) the capabilities needed by the library staff; and (6) funding. Background on the Research Library Committee and a list of members are included. (KRN)

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# A Statement from the Research Library Committee

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## In Brief

The information base for teaching and learning is being rapidly transformed by integrated information technologies—computers, telecommunications, and text storage systems. Rising costs and the compounding of information quantity amplify the problem.

Libraries, long responsible for assembling and maintaining that base, have made good use of technology for internal operations, but how libraries and faculties will deal with digitized information and unbounded means of access is not determined. It is uncertain whether universities and their libraries will productively embrace information-age capabilities or be engulfed by them.

The research library must be redefined. To set specifications for the new capabilities while protecting the substance of the old, several key steps and many specific actions are needed. To begin the process:

- Each university must undertake a fundamental rethinking of library and information service objectives.
- The organizational and financial capabilities to accomplish institutional expectations for library services must be specified and met.
- Faculty and librarians should join forces to set realistic, forward-looking national objectives for the resources and services required for research and should actively promote productive collaboration between principal research libraries and the Library of Congress.
- Librarians must view their responsibilities expansively. The core of their profession is as much educational as it is technical, and they need to bring both academic and managerial capabilities to bear on the important and increasingly complex matter of putting information to use.



A STATEMENT FROM THE  
RESEARCH LIBRARY COMMITTEE

## The Challenge to Research Libraries

Higher education is in a period of questioning, reflection, and change. While the importance of universities is widely understood and their work endorsed, they are, nevertheless, now more than ever before in competition for financial support with other, equally essential, public enterprises. The audience universities serve is increasingly diverse and brings additional requirements, more attention to teaching is being strongly urged, and the pertinence of what is taught is being scrutinized carefully because there is persistent concern about the purpose and results of undergraduate education. Further, the dependence of teaching and research on computer and related technologies has grown rapidly and has added a new level of structural complexity to continuing operations. Staffing problems loom large, and it is assumed many universities will have to take heroic measures during the next decade to cope with anticipated faculty retirements, especially in humanistic and historical disciplines.

Each of these forces has economic implications, and because financial resources will continue to be limited, the years ahead will require refinement of purpose and invention in method. Choices will have to be made and new ways of accomplishing university objectives will have to be found.

*This statement summarizes the principal recommendations of the Research Library Committee. A full report on the issues considered and actions proposed by the members will be distributed about July 1, 1990.*



What is true for universities is true for their libraries, where obligations to the past, present, and future have converged with great force. Large portions of accumulated collections are physically fragile; current publication volume is expanding worldwide, and expectations of users are honed by what they now see as technically possible. More fundamentally, it is not clear that the research library of today can be a paradigm for the twenty-first-century library. The rise of new fields of inquiry and the shifting organization of knowledge into new configurations present a demanding challenge for libraries, which conduct their collecting and bibliographic work on a historically established base. Further, uncertainty about organization and operations is implicit in a future where the extent and influence of innovation in telecommunications and electronic publishing are essentially unknown.

The form of future library service will be shaped by how well librarians cope with the sheer quantity of published material, the growing number of print and nonprint formats used to store information of interest, escalating requirements of users for access to everything of importance, new and rising costs, and the structural changes in the system of scholarly communication brought on by the interrelated technologies that are transforming how information is stored, organized, processed, and transmitted.

Fortunately, librarians have a strong record of accomplishment. They have cooperatively developed computerized bibliographic systems that identify and locate millions of publications. They have pioneered in the application to library operations and services of an ever-increasing array of information technologies. Most important, they have demonstrated that they can join forces to attack, on a national level, such intractable problems as preservation.

The years ahead will be demanding ones, but the foundation on which to build is largely in place. The members of the Research Library Committee (RLC) recognize the difficulties



libraries face, but also see an exceptional opportunity to make constructive change and assure for academic research libraries, individually and collectively, their unique, educationally important role into the twenty-first century.

## The Central Issues for Research Libraries

For libraries to succeed in a much-changed setting, the policies and priorities of each university relating to library resources and services need to be explored fully and set. Of equal importance, the capabilities required to follow those policies need to be identified and provided.

Many issues requiring attention were identified by RLC members. These examples suggest the range of pertinent policy questions.

- How can the university determine and maintain a proper balance in library support of the various scholarly disciplines that may require different services?
- What are realistic expectations for, and limits to, interinstitutional cooperation in such areas as developing complementary collections, lending materials, sharing storage space, and preserving historical collections?
- How can librarians and scholars, working in close collaboration institutionally and nationally, promote the development of additional specialized collections and the penetrating bibliographic analysis required by multidisciplinary research?
- How should the university manage access to and funding for electronic texts and information services that are charged on a per-use basis rather than sold outright? Should such charges be passed through to users, as long-distance telephone and other priced services often are?



- How far beyond conventional print materials should the library's responsibility extend, particularly in electronically stored information?
- How should the university deal with the space requirements for storage of the ever-increasing volume of printed scholarly materials?
- What should be the instructional role of libraries?

Policy issues need to be addressed specifically and regularly in each university. Faculty, librarians, and administrative officers must all take part in the process. Librarians have the responsibility to bring the issues to the table and press for a response, but they should not be expected to set policy in isolation.

## Recommendations

Policy guidance, while essential, is not enough. The capabilities required to act must also be in place. While many specific points were made during RLC deliberations, they can be gathered under a few principal heads.

### The Library of Congress

The relationship of the Library of Congress (LC) to other "national" collections must be carefully reexamined. A means to assess periodically the needs and performance of that relationship should be created, with special attention to the state of the nation's resources and services for research.

For research librarians and for scholars working in humanistic and historical fields, the Library of Congress is an institution of great importance. The many bibliographic services, especially LC bibliographic records, serve as the national standard. The special formats of material, such as maps and recordings, that are comprehensively collected and cataloged add substantially to the



national pool. The LC collections range widely and deeply into almost all areas of interest to researchers, and again, the comprehensive inclusion of special materials—prints, photographs, music, manuscripts—that complement printed works make the library a national treasure for scholars.

But even given the distinction of the Library of Congress, from the scholar's point of view the *de facto* national library for humanistic and historical scholarship is the aggregate of the Library of Congress and the other academic and independent research libraries with distinctive collections. This small group of libraries, collectively, contains scholarly resources that are unmatched in any country of the world. However, there is too little true collaboration among them and with the Library of Congress to assure that the full benefits those resources offer are realized and their comprehensiveness maintained.

Change in every aspect of our national information structure and the importance of such change to the national well-being calls for broad and consistent public attention to the quality of the nation's research base. Scholars, the directors of principal research libraries, and the Library of Congress need to join forces and plot the course for a fully productive alliance.

#### **Commitment to collaboration**

Historically, research libraries collected and acted in isolation from each other. Individuals visited libraries to make use of available collections and went elsewhere for what they did not find. During the past fifty years, research libraries have sought to respond to what have become essentially unconstrained interests of faculty and the ever-expanding agenda of higher education. Collections became global in coverage, the categories of publications acquired increased, and, still, user expectations have consistently kept ahead of collecting efforts.

The sheer quantity of material has made self-





sufficiency an unrealistic aspiration. In both collecting and building the bibliographic base, interdependence is now an acknowledged, but not necessarily fully embraced, principle. Underscoring the fact, telecommunications capabilities have expanded dramatically and changed forever the relationship among libraries and between libraries, their users, and the producers of information.

While a far-distant future may hold the prospect that some combination of perfectly integrated technologies will make all information personally accessible (the ultimate form of academic independence), the reality is that all of the forces at work—e.g., the rapidly growing quantity of information sources, the increasing complexity of demand, the volatility of technology, and the obvious presence of escalating costs inherent in any dynamic setting—make it essential that there be an aggressive commitment to effective collaboration. Improving the capacity to shape and use cooperative enterprises deserves full administrative attention. Here, perhaps more than in any other university effort, innovation in organization, appropriate financing, and assessment of performance is required.

#### **Research libraries and scholarly communication**

*Scholarly Communication*, the report of the ACLS-sponsored National Enquiry, clearly and forcefully describes scholarly communication as a system of interdependent elements—the interests and work of individual scholars, the disciplines, research libraries, the book and journal publishing communities, and public and private funding sources. Action (or inaction) in one element inevitably affects all others. This message of ten years ago is still valid and is still insufficiently attended to. It is essential, in the light of the great changes now under way in each system component, that the scholarly community take the lead in assessing the impact of actual and projected change on system performance and in making



visible both negative and positive results. Changes made anywhere in the system, including in the practices of scholars themselves, need to be scrutinized regularly. Promising trends need to be encouraged; disturbing ones should quickly be explored and, if truly threatening, forcefully identified. Communication among scholars, across disciplines, and between the world of scholarship and society at large must be unconstrained and effective. The scholarly world, both for its own well-being and for the public benefit, must be the system monitor.

#### **The library in the university structure**

The scope of library responsibilities reaches across all academic levels and affects all fields of study. Research libraries, by their nature, not only respond to individual users; they also influence what users do. The work of universities is inseparable from the substance of libraries, and the continuity inherent in the scholarly enterprise is reflected in every aspect of library operations. Libraries can be active contributors to the work of universities, but only if librarians are constructively involved in the development of academic programs. It is essential that the library be linked effectively to the faculty, to the university planning structure, and to academic and administrative governance, and that each of those university sectors does what is required to make the process of setting policies and priorities work.

#### **The library staff**

The university community obviously expects that library management will be responsible, imaginative, and productive. Collections must be built and maintained, needs of users met, and operating capabilities constantly refined to contain costs and assure that future as well as present interests are served.

But universities should expect a great deal more than managerial competence. Librarians



are each university's information service specialists. Of necessity, all librarians should be well informed about the issues of the information age—the structures for publication and distribution, information economics, government information policy, direct and indirect constraints on access to information, and the influence of information technologies. Some must have a sound understanding of the capabilities and prospects for the technologies pertinent to scholarly communication and library operations, not simply the techniques of use. Many staff members must have an active interest in a subject area, because a professional staff with strong academic credentials and a visible academic presence can greatly extend the range and influence of library service. Further, at least some staff members should be capable teachers, not only of the techniques of library use but of the substance of their calling, helping students to understand the information setting in which they will live and work.

While scholarship and the nation's information structure are inseparable, an understanding of how that structure works and its effect on research and teaching is not yet well developed. Broad-gauged, interdisciplinary research in information studies is required, and librarians have an obligation to encourage such work. As those in the academic enterprise most knowledgeable about the organization and management of information, librarians need to contribute to the analytical work that is required for a better understanding of how information is generated and used. Librarians need also to work with the growing number of scholars who are adopting information technologies for their research, both to assure that library systems enhance such scholarship and to assure that research results can be productively integrated into library information services.

The factors that affect the flow of information within disciplines, among institutions, through society, and across borders must be identified and their importance to the educational enterprise



understood. The ultimate responsibilities of the profession are to control information system complexity, to maintain information authenticity, to assure equitable access to information, and to promote effective use, by all components of society, of that which has been learned.

### Funding

The budgets of research libraries are always complex and often incomplete—complex because they reflect a continuing capital investment in building and maintaining a research collection as well as the costs of current service and instructional support, and incomplete because, in most cases, such items as space costs and certain components of institutional overhead are seldom included. Funding is further complicated by the need to invest in the information technology now required with no clear sense of the magnitude of continuing costs, and by the growing number of costly commercial information services being offered to libraries and their users.

Library costs need to be more carefully dissected and better understood in order that the value of past investment in collections not be unduly jeopardized and to insure that the fiscal implications of innovation are fully understood. Policies and costs must be more carefully related to each other, and the long-term financial implications of policy decisions need to be fully described.

The capabilities of the information age cannot be viewed simply as an extrapolation of what has gone before. They are essentially additive, and the new costs as well as current funding realities suggest that some subtractions from established operating patterns will be required to keep accounts in balance.



## A Final Note

The Research Library Committee has been able to underscore the importance of its assignment, it has identified issues that need attention, and it has speculated about the implications of alternative courses of action. It cannot by itself, however, take effective action. Given a topic as complex and diffuse as the future form of research libraries and the information structure underlying teaching and scholarship in humanistic and historical studies, action will have to come in many places and over a period of time.

This statement reaches the obvious but not always recognized conclusion that each university should put in place a continuing capability to set and make known its particular specifications for library resources and services. For such an important matter, an institutional touchstone is required to help keep expectations realistic, to guide the administration of libraries, and to provide a base for assessing the costs, values, and service implications of offerings from the growing number of information vendors seeking a market for their wares.

Beyond the large array of immediate questions, there are other topics of great interest needing attention. The economics of information, information ownership, the influence of technology on access to information, public information policy (both national and international), and factors affecting information utility are only examples. The discussions of the Research Library Committee mark the beginning of a new effort to deal with one of the most important and complex subjects of our time, but it is certain that the discussion must be a continuing one if the voice of the academic world is to be heard by those shaping the information age.



## A Note on the Research Library Committee

The Research Library Committee was established by the Council on Library Resources to explore the future form of the academic research library, with special concentration on the interests and needs of faculty members in the humanities and social sciences. Committee membership includes university presidents, senior academic officers, faculty members, and librarians and archivists, reflecting the cosponsorship of the committee by the American Council of Learned Societies, the Association of American Universities, and the Social Science Research Council.

The full committee met five times during 1988 and 1989 and explored many topics. Presentations by experts in areas of special interest and several sponsored meetings of scholars on topics pertinent to the committee's agenda also helped to inform the committee. During a final three-day session in December 1989, members reviewed past discussions and then concentrated on the key issues incorporated in this summary statement. A full report on the issues considered and actions proposed by the members is in preparation and will be distributed during the summer of 1990.

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