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The University and the Library Collection: Errors of Inclusion and Exclusion

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A usage-based categorisation of the library collection, in both print and electronic formats, into four categories is proposed. The concept of errors of inclusion and exclusion is applied to the collection and this forms the basis of a model of the relationship between the university and the collection. The model is based upon a theoretical profile of both the university and the collection. This reveals the problematic nature of the relationship between library and university in terms of the ability of the library to provide the required resources.

Introduction: why are research library collections so large?

For the British visitor to an American research university library the most striking difference between America and Britain is that collections are much larger, not only in absolute terms but also in relation to the size of the university. This paper has been developed from a study of the growth of collections in American research university libraries from 1945 to 1980. This larger study examines the rationale for the development of such large collections from the perspective of both the library and the university. Of course many American phenomena are larger than their British counterparts, but for what reasons? The reasons for large libraries potentially include: status enhancement, the availability of greater resources, institutional size, and the relative prioritisation of libraries within the American university. Britain is not without its large libraries also and further reflection reminds one that even libraries of modest size, like my own at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, have a substantial amount of older, less used, material.

It is suggested here that the large collection can be seen as a sub-optimal use of resources, because whatever its size the collection will be unable to satisfy all user needs, and is likely to include material that is not required by the community of users.

Whatever the reasons, it is the universal experience that the growing library presents considerable problems for the institution, and that the usual solutions have incurred significant capital costs, and continue to incur recurrent costs. Despite the advent of the electronic library the management of the printed collection remains a major issue. The substitution of electronic books for printed ones has yet to make a significant impact on the number of acquisitions. Weeding is of course well established as a method of coping with growth, though Slote's view is that the practice has not been adopted to a sufficient extent given the space problems constantly faced by libraries (Slote 1997, 3-7). One justification for weeding is the concept of "obsolescent" literature. This concept has been critically analysed with a view to establishing appropriate methodologies for reducing collection size (Line & Sandison 1974). An important distinction is that of obsolescence on grounds that a

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Table 1. Collection model using a usage-based categorisation of the collection

A. Material to support students in taught courses which is in active use	B. Material to support researchers which is in active use
C. Special collections (rare books and manuscripts)	D. Just-in-case material

work has been replaced by a later one, as opposed to it no longer being used (Hughes 2001, 114). We are also reminded by Hughes that usage as a criterion for weeding cannot be reduced to only circulation data (Hughes 2001, 114-115). However it may be that in the absence of other indicators we are obliged to fall back onto this criterion when making decisions. The rationale for storage away from the main collections is now well established (Block 2000; Hazen 2000).

This paper views the phenomenon of the library collection from an optimisation of resources perspective using a model of the relationship between the research university and the collection based on the concept of "errors of inclusion and exclusion."

Optimisation

The university library connects the universe of publications to the needs of its user constituency (Rayward 1969, 317-318). A test of the quality of the collection is the extent to which those needs are met. But meeting those needs is inherently problematic. It is generally true that the larger the collection, the greater is the probability that any user's specific needs will be met. But large collections are costly to acquire and maintain, and so the parent institution will need to take a view on the appropriate collections strategy to meet user needs for learning and research support. In effect it will, or least ought to, seek value for money. It will balance need for materials, which is infinite, against its need for an optimal outcome.

"Optimum" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the best or most favorable, especially under a particular set of circumstances" and "the most favorable or advantageous condition, value, or amount." This is not very adequate as a working definition unless one considers "circumstances" to include financial resources, which will be used for the purposes of this paper. The optimum solution or situation is both effective and efficient, and delivers best value for money.

The need to achieve the optimal outcome is implicit in many professional and managerial activities. The use of cheaper storage systems is a prime example which seeks a solution that balances the need for access to the material with capital and recurrent cost. Any selection decision, within the context of a finite budget, involves an assessment of the opportunity cost of one's choice e.g. the decision to purchase a bundle of electronic journals from one publisher may be at the cost of another bundle deal or a range of titles from different publishers. Of course all parties involved in the decision, or affected by it, may not agree on whether the optimum solution has been achieved. Line (1979, 107) suggests that there are many instances of libraries adopting sub-optimal practices.

A usage-based categorisation of the collection

Viewed from the perspective of usage, it is suggested that the collection consists essentially of four categories of material (see Table 1). Included are both "owned" materials and electronic resources which may be accessed via a license rather than owned.

A. Material to support students in taught courses which is in active use.

All libraries will have developed their own rules or definitions, e.g. works on reading lists and/or frequency of loans. Shelf capacity in relevant areas of the library may also be a factor. In principle such collections may have a finite size which is maintained by weeding of superseded material, older duplicates, and material that is no longer of relevance to the curriculum.

B. Material to support researchers which is in active use.

Active use is more difficult to define in this context. This might be defined as having circulated within the last few years. Alternatively it might have been consulted – which is notoriously difficult to define, or accessed online for which we now have rather better data from online vendors. Broadly speaking, it will be the material which is of relevance to current research interests. This is proposed as an alternative to the conventional logic, which is that the research university has a dual mission to support teaching and research. It follows that everything held by the library which is not used by students is therefore research material. In principle this is true in the sense that anything is potentially useful for research, but in practice a significant proportion of it tends not to be used for this, or indeed any other, purpose. It is for this reason that this low use or non-use material is categorised differently (see D. below.)

C. Special collections (rare book and manuscripts)

Special collections are a universally established category. The material will have a relatively high value which reflects its relative scarcity. They will be regarded as institutional assets; indeed in some cases the collections will have become very substantial assets. Usage is not expected to be high and most of it may come from scholars at other institutions. Libraries will normally expect to preserve such works in their collection in perpetuity. Those who attempt to sell such material, for whatever reason, will usually incur considerable opprobrium. Such material can be seen as a part of a country's cultural heritage or 'legacy' collection. It is therefore accepted that for such material the library has an obligation beyond its own user community to scholars at large; specifically the protection and conservation of such resources, and support for their use by visiting scholars. In Britain, recognising the demands that visiting scholars make upon libraries, central funding has been provided under the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) starting in 1999. Continuation of this funding is however dependent upon the strategy to be adopted by the Research Information Network (RIN). The RIN was started in 2004. In numerous cases special collections have grown so large that they have developed a momentum of their own and so continue to be developed independently of any local interest in them.

D. Just-in-case material

This is a label that might be attached to everything else in the collection which does not fall into the above 3 categories. The library implicitly accepts that it is not in demand and may not have been used for some considerable period of time. But it is retained "just in case" someone needs it at some unspecified future date. Our users will normally be supportive of this policy. Conventionally, as already discussed, this is seen as research material. For large libraries such material is likely to form the majority of the holdings, the possession of which may be regarded as the defining feature of a true university library. At the University of Sheffield which has a relatively modest collection size of 1.4 million items, approximately 50% of the collection might be assigned to this category. Studies have demonstrated that with each year that passes non-circulating items have a decreasing probability of ever circulating (e.g. Trueswell 1969; Kent 1979). By and large research libraries have come to regard retention of such material as "... being the nature of a research library" (Ellsworth 1969, 14). The view that such material should not be retained by libraries is cogently expressed by Line. He advocates concentrating resources on provision of a as wide a range of current material as possible, with a reliance upon inter-library loan for the older material.

> A sensible policy would be for libraries to discard most of their stocks of material more than, say, three or four years old, thus freeing large areas of space, and provide more current material on the spot. For this to be possible requires the existence of a publicly accessible comprehensive collection of older material, in an institution geared to rapid and efficient supply ... .(Line 1995, 12)

Just-in-case material and collection size

The existence, and growth, of this category of material results from the peculiar nature of libraries as accumulative organisations which in general are always growing in size. Battles speaks of the "relentlessly accumulative universal library" (Battles 2004, 9). Nicholson Baker sees "keeping things" as the fundamental role of the library (cited in Werking 2003, 5), and in the original and not some ersatz substitute like microfilm. There are of course some instances of steady-state or zero-growth libraries but these are relatively less common. They might however be expected to increase in number with the advent of access to remote electronic resources as a substitute for the acquisition of printed materials. The University of

Sheffield is in the process of implementing a "Zero net Collections Growth" strategy. A new student library and computing building will provide a core collection of teaching material but devote most of the space to IT equipped study and teaching space. The creation of additional space for storage of older material is not seen as cost-effective by the Library or the University. This policy is in part based upon the relatively close proximity of the British Library's collections at Boston Spa, and the ability of the British Library to satisfy most monograph requests in about 7 days.

The persistence of "just in case" material in libraries reflects the vital role of the library in the preservation of knowledge and the dominance of this paradigm in professional practice. In the case of our "great" libraries this is an explicit role (the Library of Congress, the British Library), or perhaps one that has developed over time (Harvard, Yale and the New York Public Library). An alternative rationale for the retention of "just in case material" is the status that accrues to the larger libraries. In the USA larger university libraries become eligible for membership of the Association of Research Libraries. A "great" library is more often than not a large collection. Perhaps this is because it is easier to define greatness in this way. University libraries have been reluctant to let go of this.

> Though ARL explicitly discourages interpreting quantitative rankings as indicative of performance or an assessment of quality, we continue to use traditional measures of library inputs, outputs, and calculated ratios to rank and compare libraries. (Troll 2002, 101)

Alternative indicators of library quality, e.g. book availability or quality of service to users, are rather more difficult to compare across institutions though there is increasing recognition of the need for these and most university libraries now have such systems in place.

The distinction between "special collections" and "just in case material" is one that may not be accepted by everyone. The distinction is evident in the organisation of libraries, but for those taking a more critical view of the concept of the archive they may be seen as one and the same. For most librarians the conservation of knowledge and publications remains a vital professional role. We, and our users, can acknowledge and identify with Manoff's words "... we cling to archival materials in the hope of somehow connecting to a past we can never fully know" (Manoff 2004, 17). In a time when technology may be thought to be the dominant force in our personal and professional lives, Manoff reminds us of the humanistic role of libraries. "In the cultural imaginary, the library stands as a bulwark of history, culture, and memory" (Manoff 2001, 379).

So older, less used, or unused material, is retained in libraries "just in case" someone some day will require it. Such material occupies a large proportion of the space in a typical university library, albeit often in a remote store. This suggests that the library might be smaller without too much loss in terms of its ability to satisfy user needs. In theory there should be an optimum size for the collection which balances need and cost. So there follows a model of the library collection in terms of optimising available resources.

Errors of inclusion and exclusion

We can be more precise about the role of the library's collection. It is to provide materials and resources needed by the user community at the time that they need it, i.e. the right material at the right time (Gore 1976, 172). Timeliness is important, which is why our users inevitably regard interlibrary loan as a second best solution. This is the methodological basis for book availability studies where availability is assessed on the day that an item is sought (e.g. Kantor 1986). The optimal collection is perfectly attuned to the needs of users – what they need and at the time they need it. The optimal collection would contain only what is needed i.e. no irrelevant excess, because excess consumes resources, in which case the collection is sub-optimal. For the purposes of this argument it is assumed that a library's holdings are of value only in so far as they meet users' needs. It is suggested that whatever the intrinsic worth of a book, if it is not required by the university's current staff and students, then it cannot justify its place in their library.

The concept of errors of inclusion and exclusion is widely used in the social sciences, notably in studies of the distribution of welfare benefits in developing countries (e.g. Clay, Molla & Habtewold 1999). I am indebted to Ralph Wagner's application of the concept to his history of the Farmington

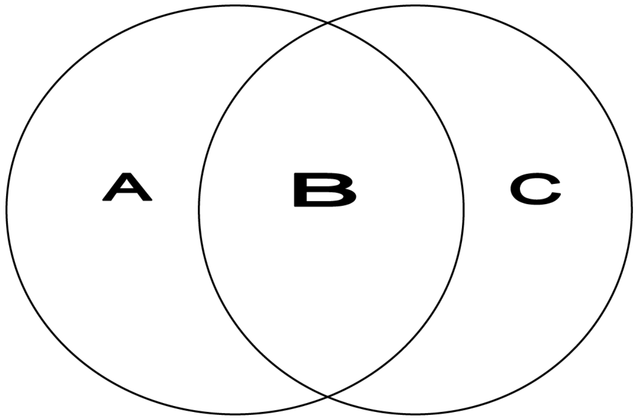
Plan (Wagner 2002) as the basis for the model of collections presented here. In the field of welfare benefits the rules for distribution of relief are crucial to the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation. If they are too widely drawn then those who do not require relief may be included (an error of inclusion). If they are too closely or wrongly drawn those who are in need may be denied benefit that they need (an error of exclusion). The optimum situation is one where only those who deserve or need benefits actually obtain them.

The concept, or at least these terms, would not appear to have been used in library and information science. But the precision/recall model of information retrieval is an example of it in practice. If one's search is too broadly defined, then an excess of irrelevant material is retrieved (an error of inclusion). If the search is too narrowly defined, then needed material will be missed (an error of exclusion).

The dilemma for librarians involved in collection development is how to make effective selection decisions within a context of the enormous bibliographic universe, their finite purchasing budget, and insatiable demands of the researcher. In the first half of the twentieth century, and perhaps beyond, completeness was the aim of the research library. The dilemma for librarians, faced with attempting this on limited budgets, is appropriately described by Swank: "The necessity of selection on one hand and of coverage on the other is enough to induce schizophrenia in the best of us" (Swank 1959, 23). The purpose of the Farmington plan was to improve coverage of foreign publications, but completeness was always going to be impossible. For example, serials were excluded which was an error of exclusion. In contrast to this, a persistent problem was the error of inclusion of a large amount of material that was sent to American libraries by their foreign agents. It soon became apparent that much of it was likely to be of little interest to the universities.

The optimal collection minimises errors of exclusion i.e. not purchasing, or having purchased, needed material, and minimises errors of inclusion i.e. purchasing material that is not used, and discarding that which has ceased to be in demand (Wagner 2002, 263). It will be readily apparent from the experience of librarians that the optimal collection is difficult, or indeed impossible to attain. But why is this?

Figure 1: Model of the profile of the university and the profile of its library collection:



A + B = profile of the university's research and teaching
B + C = profile of library collection
A = proportion of university' work that is not supported by the library collection (errors of exclusion)
B = proportion of library collection that meets university needs
C = library collection that is not relevant to the university's needs (errors of inclusion)

The profile of the library and its parent institution

Rayward sees the library as being "... caught between two highly demanding environments – its community of users and the bibliographic universe, both of which have proved in the past to be in some degree imponderable" (Rayward 1986, 317). The size and shape of the bibliographic universe is difficult to quantify. Broadly speaking, it is the totality of published and manuscript material that has ever been produced. It is likely that its extent far exceeds any one of our largest libraries.

Both the collection and the university user community can be characterised in terms of profile or shape. The profile of the university might be the sum total of all of its academic areas (subjects studied, staff and student numbers) at any moment in time. The profile of the library's collection might be the aggregate of its quantity of material, subject range, depth, and types of material included. Ideally these would be coterminous. (It is the principle rather than the detail which is described here.)

The optimum collection is achieved when the two circles overlap, i.e. are coterminous.

The two circles might be of different sizes with different degrees of overlap depending on the institution's position. The relationship between the two circles is always changing as the university's shape changes and the collection grows, e.g. a new department might be started and should ideally be replicated by a change in the shape of the collection, or a department might be closed so rendering a portion of the collection redundant.

Profile of the university

The university circle (A+B, see Figure 1) represents the constituent parts of the university (which together make up its profile). An analysis of its profile can be at varying levels of granularity.

At the first level we can readily identify disciplines or subjects, which are formed into administrative units such as departments or schools or faculties. Such units of organization are responsible for the management of degree programmes and modules. The nature and extent of these will be made apparent via published documentation in the university's calendar or equivalent document. The Collection Development policy will be expected to reflect this level of information, and in well-organized institutions the librarian will have an involvement in the planning of degree programmes.

At the second level are the interests of individual faculty and students within each department; for example, in the sciences the research group may be a significant entity within departments. Considerable effort and resource is required to ascertain these and the library will find it impossible to discover completely the needs of users at the individual level; though some users will make them known. Within this level the individual's interests can be defined at different levels of detail. S/he might be an inorganic chemist, with a speciality in organometallic chemistry. Within this area a range of key topics will indicate their speciality, which in the case of a chemist would include a range of compounds and experimental processes. A large Chemistry department in Britain will have around 30 permanent academic staff, a similar number of contract research staff, and around 100 research students. The number of people, range of interests, and complexity of the subject presents formidable obstacles for the librarian who seeks to select materials to meet academic need. The quantity of literature of potential interest to chemistry researchers is enormous, it being the best documented of the pure sciences disciplines.

The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research exacerbates this problem. Sheffield's Polymer Centre involves researchers in Chemistry, Physics, Engineering, Medicine and Dentistry. At Sheffield, which is typical of Britain's large research universities, 80% of Library funds for research support are allocated to the faculties of Pure Science, Engineering and Medicine. It might be argued that the difficulties for librarians in comprehending research are less in the non-science subjects. But everywhere in the university, including the humanities, there will be problems of comprehending academic interests even for library staff with academic knowledge of the disciplines. Some interests are, to the uninitiated, surprising: knowledge management in the School of Architecture; the Bible and postcolonialism in the Biblical Studies department. Interests in topics such as post modernism and globalisation increasingly pervade many humanities and social sciences departments. Inevitably, this poses a problem for the quality of selection decisions where they are initiated by library staff, and this may therefore tend to reduce their involvement in the process.

At the third level is the range of interests of any individual library user which may prompt them to search for library materials, e.g. a specific idea generated from a research project will require a literature search. The possibility of a connection between two hitherto unconnected areas, topics, or substances might occur to the researcher who is familiar with one of them but not the other, which might lie in a different academic area. The essence of this level is its unpredictability. As a result of which "The librarian is vulnerable to every imaginable kind of demand from the faculty and has no defense except lack of funds" (Swank 1955, 42).

All of these interests and specialities, at each level, are in a constant state of change. Occasionally departments will close down or new ones will be started. Faculty leave and are replaced, often by people with different interests. At Sheffield the Geography Department's 2005 application to the Library's Development Fund stated that "The Department has added 3 new teaching staff in the last year ... all three introduce new areas of research and teaching and their current needs are under resourced by the University's library." In Britain, the periodic Research Assessment Exercise, where quality is assessed on the basis of the faculty's research, has seen a 'transfer market' in faculty which has significantly increased their mobility, especially at the senior level. This has led to significant discontinuities in the departmental research profile.

Research students present a similar difficulty. While those in the STM area are likely to join established research groups, others may be accepted with a topic that is new to the department and therefore not adequately supported by library collections. Doctoral students will turn over at approximately four yearly intervals. At the individual level, researchers will make a range of demands upon the library collection whenever pursuing a new line of enquiry. At this level there can be no planning for the future as the individual him/herself has no idea of where their interests may take them. In Rayward's words (1986, 101) the future is "... essentially unknowable." This approach reinforces Osburn's description of academic research and instruction as the "unconstrained universe", which is contrasted to the constrained functions of the library (Osburn 1979, 2).

It is standard practice to develop a profile of our parent institution so as to serve it appropriately, but we need to be realistic about the prospect of achieving this at a meaningful level of detail. The standard works on collection development tend to understate the problem e.g. Clayton and Gorman view the university as "... relatively homogeneous within itself and has definable boundaries of reading interests" (Clayton & Gorman 2001, 83).

The profile of the library

In contrast to the ever-changing profile of the university, that of the library has enormous inertia. Ranganathan's 5th law states that a "library is a growing organism":

> ... the library as an institution, has all the attributes of a growing organism. A growing organism takes in new matter, casts off old matter, changes in size and takes new shape and forms. (Ranganathan 1957, 326)

This is fine in theory, but the reality is that significant organic change, other than an increase in size, is difficult or impossible to achieve.

Collections accumulated to support a particular academic area will remain long after those who required them have left or moved on to other topics. Occasionally collections will be sold on to other libraries but an inhibiting factor will be the difficulty of defining the works to be disposed of in this way. Faculty in cognate areas will resist any disposal of material of potential interest. The accumulated collection may be of such quality that the library maintains its acquisitions in the field despite the lack of immediate users.

Typically the profile of the library tends to get bigger even though the profile of the university may not increase in size, so the number of volumes held per student tends to increase. Reading time per student or per faculty member, of course, remains broadly constant. It is therefore unsurprising that much of the library's collection gets little use.

Book selection

The library's profile is the outcome of every selection decision that resulted in the addition of an item to the library's stock, and its retention there. Although there is a wealth of advice, guidance, and policy on the matter of selection, the process remains inherently problematic and prone to error. There is an abundance of guidance on collection development statements (e.g. Anderson 1996) and policy-making (e.g. Futas 1995), but the typical policy offers limited assistance in making actual selection decisions. In addition to the problem of ascertaining the relevance of any published work to the university's programme of research and teaching, there is the difficulty of assessing the quality of a work without being able to read it.

While librarians may accept that much material will be underused, such knowledge is of limited use in making selection decisions. (There are some exceptions to this e.g. where one knows that interest in a subject has ceased.) In theory, the quality of selection decisions could be improved by seeking more information before committing to purchase, but this implies deferral and delay in providing needed material, and also the availability to selectors of more time in which to make decisions. Neither of these is likely to be feasible. It can be argued that while the faculty are possessed of the necessary expertise, their reluctance in many cases to participate in the selection process means that librarians are required to fill that gap as best they can. There is a long running debate on the merits of selection by faculty versus selection by librarians. Waples and Lasswell's classic study of selection is often cited to support the view that librarians can do it better, but the durability of this argument is called into question by the increased complexity of modern research and publications (Waples & Lasswell 1936). The consensus now is that a partnership is required if selection decisions are to be optimized within the constraints of available knowledge and finance (Osburn 1990, 3–5).

Journal selection

In the case of journals the process is even more prone to error because a selection decision has been taken on the basis that a title is likely to contain material of importance and interest. With the advent of usage data from electronic journal suppliers we have the opportunity for the first time to assess the amount of usage of each title. The subscription to a complete bundle of titles, such as Elsevier's Science Direct, may indicate that previous subscription decisions have been suboptimal. A rank ordering of titles by usage reveals that some previously unsubscribed titles have high usage. The likely explanation for this phenomenon is that hitherto the library was unable to afford a subscription to these titles (an error of exclusion). At the lower end of the rank order, one tends to find some existing paper subscription titles which receive little use (an error of inclusion). The reason for this may be that interest in the title(s) has ceased, but has not been communicated to, or perceived by, the library.

The bundle or basket deal, where it includes a large amount of previously unsubscribed content, enlarges the library's profile. It is likely to be the case that much of it is not used because of a lack of relevance to current academic interests, so it falls into category D (just-in-case materials) of the model (see Table 1). Because the maintenance costs of this unused material are low or perhaps non-existent, this is less of a cost burden than the maintenance of printed materials. This assertion is of course only true if the bundle deal itself is considered to offer value for money to the extent that the benefit of previously unavailable material outweighs the cost of including the unused. It also ignores some staffing costs in the cataloguing of electronic resources. It is also likely that the benefits are greatest for libraries which previously had subscribed to a relatively small number of the titles in any one bundle. Titles that are wanted, but were previously unaffordable, are now available and such material falls into category B of my model. Of course as the profile of the university changes, such bundle deal titles may move between categories B and D.

Librarians who are involved in the provision of electronic resources are well aware of the range of issues arising from the fact that we no longer own material but pay to access it, and may continue to access it for only as long as we continue to pay for it. The issues of ownership, permanence, stability and control raise new issues for how we conceive of the "collection" (Casserly 2002, 579-580). However we resolve such issues in the future it remains the case that selection of content decisions continue to be crucial. User survey evidence at the University of Sheffield library suggests that despite the increase in number of electronic journals, our users continue to demand more. And so our virtual collection continues to demonstrate errors of exclusion.

Weeding and discard

Weeding and discard solutions are based upon an acceptance that errors have been made in the past or that the value of an item to the university has diminished. They can be seen as an attempt to re-profile the collection to meet current academic need. Unfortunately, for the advocates of such policies, it is the case that once an item has been added to stock its status alters. Whereas it takes only one person to decide to purchase a book, it may take many people to approve of its discard, because the potential uses and users of a book are multiple in nature (Swank 1955, 137). Any increase in number of people consulted about discarding any item tends to increase the probability of opposition. The faculty may be more or less philosophical about the library never having purchased a book but they will be angry if they require an item which turns out to have been purchased and then discarded.

The cost of keeping books is obscured by two factors. Typically the cost of space is not a charge on the Library's budget. New space will be funded by a once only capital expenditure, with recurrent costs paid for by non-library funds. Secondly, the library's administrative and servicing costs of stack and remote storage areas are, if they are known, difficult to communicate to users. By and large the concept of opportunity cost is not high on the university's agenda, at least as far as recurrent costs are concerned. Such costs are just one element in the total cost of materials of which the purchase price is the most obvious and easily identified.

Conclusion

It will be apparent from this analysis that there may be two major reasons why the profile of the library and profile of the university fail to overlap. Firstly the retention of older material fails to meet current needs for any particular topic; secondly it is difficult to select material that meets current needs where those needs are imperfectly understood. Material selected in error has even less chance of longer term usefulness than does material that was once well used but has now been overtaken by more recent literature on the same subject. (One might add a third reason, which is that some material has been identified as relevant to current needs but is simply unaffordable.)

This analysis would appear to suggest that actual practice contradicts the implicit purpose of the library. An early example of a general statement of purpose for the university library is provided by Swank:

> It needs to be said from the first that the library derives its very nature from the university. It has, and should have, no purpose of its own, no life apart from the institution it serves. It is what it is, does what it does, and costs what it costs primarily because the university has needed and wanted it so (Swank 1955, 41).

Today the typical mission statement is both broader and more specific in scope. In the case of the American state university libraries, it will include a reference to the wider community beyond the university. For our great libraries it will embrace a commitment to the preservation of knowledge for all of humanity. But for all libraries the key question is whether the collection provides effective and efficient support for the needs of its user constituency. Libraries are increasingly aware of the need to contribute to their parent institution's goals (Fraser & McClure 2002, 520).

It may be thought that the overall picture of the research library presented here is a rather pessimistic one, and that in doing so it echoes Osburn's (1990) critique. My intention has been to provide a critical perspective on what we do, and to raise questions about long established library practice and policy. The analysis does explain why our users might be dissatisfied with the collection at their own university. In an age when they are invited to assess the quality of services by such instruments as LibQUAL+, this may be a significant matter for all research libraries. This is especially the case where users are being asked their opinion of all campus services, and where the performance of the library may be regarded as lower than that of other services. The range, quantity, and unpredictability of user demands upon our collections are a unique feature of library services, and one that requires recognition by the university.

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