

Departmental Libraries: Why Do They Exist?

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ABSTRACT

In response to an increasing concern on the part of the library staff over the role of the departmental libraries at The Milton S. Hershey Medical Center of The Pennsylvania State University, a questionnaire was developed by the George T. Harrell Library and sent to departmental libraries. From the analyzed responses, the authors were able to define the role of departmental libraries in a medical school/hospital situation, to analyze the Hershey Medical Center situation in an objective manner, to outline areas of possible cooperation between the main and departmental libraries, and to delineate some trends which appear to result from inadequate funding of a central library. Overall, the library found that departmental libraries at Hershey are currently maintaining collections consistent with the functional role of a departmental library.

A GROWING concern regarding the increasing rate of departmental acquisitions (Table 1) and the diversity of subject matter which these acquisitions represent, as well as the increasing need to refer patrons to departmental collections for items which the George T. Harrell Library (hereinafter referred to as the "main" or "central" library) does not own, prompted the authors to evaluate the role of departmental libraries at the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center (HMC). In doing so, an attempt was made to (1) define the role of departmental libraries in a medical school/hospital situation, with special reference to Hershey Medical Center; (2) analyze the HMC situation in an objective way and to comment from the main library's standpoint; (3) ascertain general trends which appear to result from inadequate funding of the central library; and (4) define, if possible, areas in which cooperation between the main library and departments would be beneficial to the entire sphere of HMC.

ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARY

In dealing with departmental libraries, a distinction must be made between a "library" and a "collection." The term "library" implies the existence of an autonomous unit offering most or all of the established functions of a library, such as acquisitions, reference, and cataloging. On the other hand, small "collections" of ready reference tools, heavily used texts, and specialized materials are a must for departments engaged in active teaching, research, or patient care [1]. Ideally, these collections should be administered by the main library [2], which should, in turn, have in its collection a copy of each book and journal that is in the departmental collection, except in cases where very specialized or nonmedical items are required. Table 2 compares the main library holdings with those of the departments.

The merits of centralization versus decentralization have long been debated [3]. The literature cites two general types of decentralization: (1) decentralization based on an operations-oriented pattern; and (2) decentralization based on a user-subject oriented method. This second type is, by far, the most common.

Despite the choice of organization, the matter to be considered is whether or not the information needs of the institution are being met, and how well these needs are met.

Cost effectiveness and utility are of major concern to those responsible for providing information. Duplication versus acquisition of unique titles, proximity versus general accessibility, collection maintenance time, and space are perennial conflicts to be resolved. Further complicating matters is the rising interdependence in all fields of learning, resulting in the department's

TABLE 1
CATALOGING STATISTICS FOR MONOGRAPHS IN MAIN
AND DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES, FISCAL YEAR
(FY) 1967/68 THROUGH 1975/76

FY	Main library	Dept. libraries
1967/68	5,286	0
1968/69	2,321	2,771
1969/70	2,378	832
1970/71	2,237	722
1971/72	2,096	1,040
1972/73	1,929	1,766
1973/74	1,136	910
1974/75	1,024	1,042
1975/76	565	1,253
Total	18,972	10,336

need for materials outside its subject specialty. Provision of these items in the central library should eliminate the necessity for the department to acquire them.

Bruno [4] contends that in most academic institutions, some degree of decentralization is expedient in order to facilitate instruction and research by affording faculty and researchers readier access to requisite materials. However, the "convenience" of a departmental library is deceptive because "over the years the special group for whom the facility is provided comes to regard the branch [that is, the department library] as the whole university library and hampers its own research by its provincial attitude toward the library system in toto" [5]. In many cases, "the departmental library tends to become the exclusive domain of the department, and generally permits use of or lends materials to those outside the department grudgingly" [5].

TABLE 2
TOTAL MONOGRAPHS AND JOURNAL TITLES IN MAIN
AND DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES

	Monographs		Journal titles	
	No.	%	No.	%
Main library	13,100	78.5	1,600	96.5
Departmental libraries	3,750	21.5	58*	3.5
Total	16,850	100.0	1,658	100.0

*Unique titles. Departmental subscriptions total 242, but 184 titles duplicate the Harrell Library's holdings.

In evaluating the merits of each side, it appears that the essence of the departmental versus central library question is the contradiction between the desire on the part of the faculty and researchers for immediate physical proximity to constantly used texts and journals, and the intensified requirement for frequently consulting a broad spectrum of literature to support modern teaching and research.

LIBRARY ORGANIZATION AT HMC

The main library is centrally located between the College of Medicine and the hospital, both of which are housed in one sprawling, multistoried building. Its collection of over 79,000 volumes (including 13,000 monographs and 1,662 journal subscriptions) serves the clinical, teaching, and research programs of faculty and students.

Materials for all disciplines, including allied health fields, represented at HMC are collected on the reference level. Programs offering Ph.D. level work are covered on the research level.* When a department acquires a book that the main library does not own, a copy is purchased if it is a recent publication and if the budget permits. However, the humanities and behavioral science departments are engaged in unique teaching and research programs for which they assume acquisition responsibility. These materials are housed in the respective departmental libraries, not in the main library. Reserve materials for all programs are acquired by the main library.

All faculty requests for book or journal purchases must be approved by the librarian, who evaluates them with respect to utility and cost. If approved, materials generally appear on the shelf within two days to two months.

Approximately forty departmental libraries, ranging in size from 40 to 1,700 volumes (average: 310), exist within the Medical Center. Twenty-five of these departments have books cataloged by the main library. Cataloged departmental holdings appear in the main library's public catalog.

Although the main library catalogs books for the departments, advises on collection organization, and offers to house older journal volumes, each department is totally responsible for its own ordering, shelf maintenance, circulation, and binding.

*For a definition of the terms "reference level" and "research level" see Annan, G. L., and Felner, J. W., eds. *Handbook of Medical Library Practice*. 3d ed. Chicago, Medical Library Association, 1970. p. 73.

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ANALYSIS OF HMC DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARIES

In order to obtain an overall view of the actual situation concerning departmental libraries at HMC, the authors devised a questionnaire which was sent to the twenty-five departments for which the central library catalogs books. All but four were completed and returned. In evaluating the responses, it should be noted that many questions elicited multiple replies.

Responsibility for the Library

Twenty respondents indicated that the department or division chairman is responsible for making policy decisions, including those on acquisitions, regarding the departmental library. One department delegated this duty to a faculty member. Physical maintenance of the collection is generally assigned to a secretary, who expends approximately one to three hours per week on library tasks. Three departments indicated that the time spent on library maintenance is less than one hour per week, and two departments estimated that at least five hours per week are required for the job.

Acquisitions

Only five departments have a formal, written policy regarding the acquisition of library materials. In most cases, any department member may order books and journals, subject to the approval of the department/division chairman. When purchases are made with grant money, no such approval is necessary.

The purposes for maintaining a departmental collection were overwhelmingly defined as (1) ease and convenience in having materials handy; and (2) the need for constantly consulted volumes. The demand for specialized research material and the need for books and journals essential to the department's programs, but not purchased by the library, are also factors of prime importance. Only one department purchases books primarily because the central library's security system is so inadequate that in order to have the materials available, the department feels it must maintain its own collection.

Fourteen departments occasionally request books through the main library prior to purchasing them for the departmental collection. However, this procedure is generally inconsistent. In fact, nine departments do not know what percentage of their requests are actually honored by the central library. Departments indicating that 10% to 100% of requests are granted are

most often departments requiring reserve material for students.

One of the reasons cited for not making library requests was that by the time the main library is able to purchase an item, the immediate need for the item has passed. This indicates to the authors that perhaps many departmental acquisitions reflect real but temporary needs, and therefore, may indeed not warrant library expenditure. Over one-half of the respondents claimed that they would continue making 50% to 100% of their present purchases, even if the central library owned a copy of each item. The major portion of such acquisitions represents textbooks and journals, rather than atlases or specialized materials.

The actual amount of dollars allotted for purchase of library materials is directly dependent upon the types of materials acquired and the extent of the department's teaching and research programs. In general, the more extensive these programs the greater the expenditure, the reported range being between \$200 and \$5,000, with an average of \$1,186. Ten departments spend over \$500 per year. Seven departments spend \$500 or less, and four departments declined to answer.

Departmental funds in conjunction with those from grants constitute the majority of departmental library financial resources. Gifts and memberships in scientific societies account for only a small percentage of expenditures, although two departmental collections have been developed exclusively from grant funds and gifts.

Coordination of purchasing efforts with the main library or with other departments is virtually nonexistent, except in the case of one department which attempts to hold down duplication of materials that are in the central library.

Space

The potential problem of space had been considered by most of the respondents, who indicated that their probable solution would be to give older material and duplicate copies to the central library. Only six departments had not given the matter serious consideration.

Access, Circulation, Interlibrary Loan Policies

Access to departmental collections is severely limited in several respects. Hours of availability range from a daily 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. schedule (nine departments) to a twenty-four-hours-with-key availability (ten departments). Four of these

libraries issue keys to all departmental personnel. In other cases, a key is obtainable only through the department office. Often, special functions held in the departmental library further curtail hours of collection accessibility. In contrast, the Harrell Library is open from 8:00 A.M. to midnight, Monday through Thursday; 8:00 A.M. to 10 P.M., Friday; 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Saturday; and 2:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M., Sunday.

Generally, anyone affiliated with the Medical Center is permitted use of materials within the department library, only one department limiting even in-house use to its own personnel. Borrowing privileges, however, are not quite as lenient. Eight libraries do not circulate any material, six libraries circulate items only to department members, and eight libraries permit only HMC students and personnel to borrow books and journals.

Of those departments which permit circulation of books and journals, eleven have a semiformalized charge-out system, similar to that employed in the central library. Only four departments specify a lending period, ranging from one day to one month.

Five respondents claim some attempt to maintain a shelf inventory, but most do not seem to be overly concerned with the problem of missing items. Five libraries follow up on overdue materials, usually by personal contact.

Interlibrary loan policies are generally quite stringent. Twelve departments honor no requests for ILL; six departments permit some ILL at the discretion of the department chairman; and two are quite cooperative with requests from the main library. One department said that it had never been faced with the situation. In most cases where ILL is permitted, lending is restricted to the local geographical area or to libraries from which department members have previously received ILL items. Reflected in these ILL policies, and to a certain extent in each department's general circulation philosophy, is the consensus of the faculty that the ready availability of these materials to their own personnel is of prime importance.

With the exception of one department, the respondents viewed the role of the departmental library as one which served to place heavily used materials within quick reach and to supplement the collection of the central library.

Library Consultation Services

Present library consultation service to the departments is limited to the cataloging of books and

advice on collection organization and shelf maintenance. Eighteen departments indicated that some advantage had already been taken of such services via the cataloging department. Three of the responding departments do not seek assistance from the central library beyond the initial cataloging of books, probably because these collections are small enough to be managed easily.

It was the authors' hope that the questionnaire would elicit some constructive criticism of the general library situation. Unfortunately, very few comments were made. One department reiterated its justification for the existence of departmental collections by stating its need to provide specific materials to people involved in five different residency programs. Several respondents indicated that inadequate book and journal acquisitions by the main library were of major significance in the choice of materials for addition to departmental collections. Only one of the departments with an extensive collection did not reply to the questionnaire. The authors feel that its having done so would not greatly alter the overall analysis of the HMC situation. However, statistics regarding the collection size, annual expenditures, and ILL policies might be affected slightly.

AREAS FOR POSSIBLE COOPERATION

Several possibilities for departmental and main library cooperation are apparent. A strong effort is required by the main library to add new journals and recent editions of textbooks to the collection, to develop subject areas sufficiently to serve program requirements, and to take the initiative in being aware of departmental needs. A more stringent follow-up on book requests from departments is also essential. If requests are denied, reasons must be given, and a conscious effort made to reevaluate them when restrictions have been lifted. Cooperative acquisitions with departments may also be a logistically and financially sound possibility. Finally, the main library has a responsibility for the security of materials in the library, in order to insure the availability of items when they are needed.

In light of perennial budget problems, the departments, too, must shoulder some of the responsibility by donating to the central library some of their duplicate books and journal subscriptions. Such gifts are always publicly acknowledged. By taking an active part in recommending books and journals for library purchase, and by aggressively supporting increased central library acquisitions in general, departments serve

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not only their own interests, but also those of the institution as a whole.

On the whole, those responsible for departmental libraries are maintaining collections consistent with the concept of a departmental library's function. Annual expenditures and collection size also appear to be consistent. In a few instances, however, the subject area of many books (such as history of medicine or collections of general essays for a clinical department) seems to be quite outside the realm of defined acquisition policy.

These cases pose several pertinent questions. Are peripheral acquisitions gifts to members of the department? In which case, why are they not housed in the main library for the benefit of all? Are the departments really "empire building" as Beatty [1] would suggest, at the expense of the central library? Or is it a question of self-defense acquisition, in which the department purchases items for its own collection because the central library cannot or will not purchase them for the general collection? If this is the situation, why are there not more ardent and formal complaints to appropriate authorities concerning the need for adequate financial support of the main library?

None of the above reasons can be singled out as the major cause of the apparent increase in departmental acquisitions. To a certain extent, all have great influence. However, the current situation does point out the necessity for determining an overall acquisitions policy and clarification of the roles of the central medical library and the departmental collections. A clear definition of these roles would provide mutual understanding of the scope of each facility. It also indicates the necessity for adequate financial support for the central library, as well as places the obligation on the main library to maintain good public relations and open communications with the departments.

Two valuable products resulted from the current survey. A table of accessible hours, user privileges, and interlibrary loan policies of the various departmental collections was compiled. It is expected that this information will facilitate more efficient service to library users in general. In addition, one department even offered to

purchase a specified number of books for the main library, provided that it had a part in the selection of the items.

IN CONCLUSION

That departmental collections play a vital role in providing essential information needs to Hershey Medical Center personnel cannot be denied. Convenient and rapid access to heavily used materials is absolutely essential to the provision of adequate patient care, education, and research. In addition, nonmedical programs, such as the humanities and behavioral science programs at HMC, require materials covering a broad spectrum of subject matter, and extensive acquisitions in these areas cannot be justified financially by the central library.

Several trends in departmental library acquisitions are apparent. Generally speaking, insufficient security, coupled with inadequate financial support of the central medical library, appears to foster an increased rate of book and journal purchases by departments. In addition, the accessibility of materials within the Medical Center as a whole ultimately decreases as the number of items housed in facilities with limited hours of availability increases.

It is the authors' hope that the results of the survey and the opinions stated herein will lead to better public relations between the library and the departments, and to a genuine concern for cooperation in providing for the information needs of the institution.

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