

Academic Library Planning: Looking at Needs of Special Groups

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Planning in academic libraries continues to be a major consideration to that segment of the profession. Arthur M. McAnally and Robert B. Downs¹ noted in the early 1970s that libraries had been deficient in this regard; urgent redress of this problem would be necessary during that decade.

Among components of planning the authors indicated these: expectations by the institutions of higher education for services by the library consonant with university needs; goals of the library and its support of developing academic programs and consequent learning needs; and, finally, all library services, both physical and human.² These segments of planning constitute those of basic roles of the library. Anticipating all future needs is an area with which many academic libraries have dealt inadequately, emphasis being on answering pressing immediate demands by the university/college community. Specifically, looking to the future of increased user demand, measurement of present use of materials and services should become part of the planning process, as well as the generation of new use by clienteles which the university or college is already serving.

Planning in academic librarianship with regard to clienteles to be served involves those who serve as well as those who are served. Planning for the future in these institutions involves not only that concerning outlays of money and its direction, but more importantly, the attitudes of those who will use that money in salaries or implementation of programs to serve the needs of those who request such services.

In academic libraries, changes are coming as the result of tightened budgets from a straitened economy. More is being demanded from less. More in the sense of imaginative answers to needs of persons not always considered as part of the mainstream of academic librarianship's clientele, less in terms of money and staff.

One illustration of this fact is that older adults have for several years been entering the field of higher education as students. They join such programs as Elderhostel, which formally began in New England in 1975. This particular program has mushroomed in recent years, especially in the late 1970s when it grew from a small number of states that had institutions sponsoring it to its present rate where programs are located in institutions in all 50 states and abroad.

Elderhostel as an older adult program has not been well known among all of the staff at any one host institution.³ Librarians as representatives of some of that staff, indicate in some cases that they really do not know the program, and the times when it is being held on their campuses. Because librarians in an academic institution represent a portion of the public service sector of any institution of higher education, they would as individuals, be ones to show a favorable or unfavorable response to an influx of new clientele on campus who would be desiring the services the library could offer.

Elderhostel has certain characteristics not inherent in other college programs. It is a residential program of short duration (a one week stint generally for a group of adults in the 60+ age group). These people enrolled herein are enjoying education for its own sake, in short, a liberal education, one without the strictures of tests or grades.

The adults who enroll are ones who in the main have the desire to investigate learning possibilities in this setting. They are not necessarily in financial or physical conditions which enhance travel from one institution to another within a two-three week period. However, this author has noted that this program has tended to include many persons of high self-motivation, developed interests, assumed financial ability to travel and good health.⁴

As a librarian, one may observe that these persons do find the library a resource of information in the process of self-paced learning. They like to check out books and any other materials which circulate, and to have reference service immediately available. This was especially true with regard to genealogy, which is a pursuit most of these persons undertook, especially when they enrolled in a course called "Roots."⁵

Older adults are growing in numbers as demographic trends show; they are likely to be better educated, and thus will demand services in institutions of higher education. Services would include classes not necessarily for career entry or re-entry, but rather courses and library services that involve learning for the sake of solving information problems that particularly interest them, as well as for personal satisfaction, new experiences, and meeting people.

How do librarians feel about this idea generally? Academic librarians have largely been geared to student and faculty populations that have attended classes for at least one term. With people in this program, librarians can provide many of the same services but perhaps reformatted to accommodate persons on campus for a shorter time span.

Concern for the librarians' interface with older adult patrons as one user group derives from the library's position as public forum in an institution of higher education. Planning for the future in the academic library will likely involve service to such user groups as the older adult and other groups as well.

Notes

¹ Arthur M. McAnally and Robert B. Downs, "The Changing Role of Directors of University Libraries," *College and Research Libraries* 34 (March 1973): 103-124.

² *Ibid.*, 115.

³ The observations of this author are based upon research completed for the PhD dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh; *Service to Older Adult Users of Academic Libraries: A Study of Librarian Attitudes* (1980).

⁴ These persons were observed at Glenville State College in 1979 and 1980. They were, from evidence derived from personal conversation and contact, persons of motivation and drive, self-possession, good health and sufficient resources to enable travel. Furthermore, many were well-educated. Elderhostel places no restriction on educational levels of its participants.

⁵ Course offered to Elderhostelers at Glenville State College, 1979 and 1980.