

The Political Environment of Libraries in The University of North Carolina

by Benjamin F. Speller, Jr.

State universities are institutions of higher education that carry out their missions, goals, and objectives with substantial financial support from the state legislature. State universities are usually given legal authority by legislative mandate or by provisions in the states' constitutions; and are governed by a board whose duties, responsibilities, and authority are established by the state legislature. By the very nature of their establishment and governance structures, state universities are generally at center stage of state politics.

The libraries of state universities, as major academic support units of their parent institutions, are also a part of state politics. Politics is often regarded as the art of getting one's preferences included in governmental or organizational policy. State universities and their libraries must seek and maintain support within the context of two basic political issues: (1) the state hierarchy for higher education¹ and (2) the state budget.²

The purpose of this article is to provide: (A) a brief description of the evolutionary process that led to the current political environment and governance structure of The University of North Carolina; (B) the strategies used by the administrators and librarians in dealing with the state budget as a political force in supporting The University of North Carolina libraries; (C) the economic and technological forces that are having a significant impact on traditional strategies that have been used by administrators and librarians; and (D) the reality shifts that must take place to ensure survival of an adequate information infrastructure to support the research and instructional support needs of The University of North Carolina.

The Political Environment and Governance Structure for State-Supported Higher Education

The University of North Carolina³ was authorized by the State Constitution of 1776 and chartered by the General Assembly of 1789 [Laws 1789, and ch. 20.]. In 1868, the new state constitution gave more explicit recognition to the University, as did an 1873 constitutional amendment. Throughout that period, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was the only state-supported institution of higher education in North Carolina. Between 1877 and 1969, the General Assembly created or acquired for the state the other fifteen institutions that are now part of The University of North Carolina.

In 1970, the citizens of the state voted to adopt a new state

constitution which took effect in 1971. Whereas the State Constitution of 1868 acknowledged the existence of The University of North Carolina, the new constitution of 1972 mandated a public system of higher education, comprising The University of North Carolina and other institutions of higher education.

The current governance structure for state-supported higher education evolved from a political environment that was consistent with the national situation. Until 1955, institutional prerogatives on initiation of new programs and related support resources for them were only controlled by the ability of the administrators and their constituencies to obtain financial resources from the General Assembly

or from private or corporate donors. In 1955, a Board of Higher Education was created for the purpose of allocating functions and activities among the state-supported institutions of higher education. This organization proved to be ineffective because of its lack of authority from the General Assembly. The state-supported institutions, in fact, remained unchecked in their ambitions because the General Assembly did not have a state-

wide plan or set of goals for higher education. Thus from 1955 until 1969, institutional ambitions and program proliferation proceeded almost unimpeded by any major restraints.

Eventually, rising costs and the significant increase in legislative involvement in educational decisions led to a lengthy debate on the restructuring of higher education in North Carolina and, in 1971, to the creation of a Board of Governors which would be the central policy-making and governing authority for public higher education in North Carolina.

One of the political issues that most state universities have to face is where they fit within the state hierarchy for post-secondary and higher education because an institution's mission classification is used as a major funding assumption. The most widely recognized method of determining this hierarchy is the classification scheme for colleges and universities that was developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.⁴ The Board of Governors has placed the sixteen constituent institutions of The University of North Carolina in the following categories:

1. **Major Research Universities** are North Carolina State University at Raleigh and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There is currently one quasi-research institution, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, that is placed under the research universities category as a doctoral granting university I.

The Board of Governors will probably change the classifica-

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tion in the future for East Carolina University if the expansion of its doctoral program offerings is approved, and changes are expected for North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte if proposed new doctoral programs are authorized. These institutions will probably be designated as doctoral granting universities II by the Board of Governors.

2. **Major Comprehensive Universities** are Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, North Carolina Central University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Western Carolina University.

3. **Regional Comprehensive Universities or Colleges** are Elizabeth City State University, Pembroke State University, the University of North Carolina at Asheville, Winston-Salem State University.

4. **Major Schools of the Fine Arts.** North Carolina currently has one institution in this category, North Carolina School of the Arts.

The Systems Context of State Budgeting for The University of North Carolina Libraries

The budget is a major force in state politics. Nearly all political activity centers around state budget appropriations.⁵ A state system of higher education is usually considered a subsystem of the total system of state government. The subsystem for budgeting is usually composed of at least four components: (1) the state executive budget office, (2) the state legislative committees and staffs, (3) the state higher education agency (a few states do not have this unit), and (4) the institutions of higher education. The budgeting system for The University of North Carolina operates in this context.

Budget preparation in North Carolina is based on constitutional authority.⁶ The North Carolina Constitution requires the Governor to "prepare and recommend to the General Assembly a comprehensive budget of the anticipated revenue and proposed expenditures of the state for the ensuing fiscal period." The University of North Carolina is the state's higher education agency which is composed of the Board of Governors, The UNC General Administration with a chief executive officer, the president, and the sixteen institutions with their chief administrative officers, the chancellors. The President of The University of North Carolina and his staff prepare for the Board of Governors the recommended higher education budget for the state. Budget preparation is based on formulas, economic assumptions, budget guidelines, University priorities, and other data.

The Director of Libraries at each one of the sixteen constituent institutions of The University of North Carolina is responsible for communicating the requirements for respective campuses to the campus Chancellor. Communicating the sixteen libraries' requirements to the UNC President and the Board of Governors is equally important because the staff of the UNC system must be strongly committed to the development of libraries within the system; they make decisions about the proper development of libraries within the system and about the allocation of state budget funds to the UNC university libraries. The campus chancellors have not always agreed with a direct communication process by the librarians to the system-wide administration and the UNC Board of Governors. However, this direct communication process has been the most effective strategy for keeping the Board of Governors staff apprised of the special needs

of libraries in The University of North Carolina. This communication process has been implemented through the University Library Advisory Council (ULAC) which is composed of the head librarians of the sixteen institutions in The University of North Carolina. ULAC was originally organized in 1969 by the Board of Higher Education to advise on funding and improvement of North Carolina's public university libraries.

Prior to 1969, planning and funding of the state's public university libraries were the responsibility of each local institution. Adequate library resources for each campus depended upon the priority which each university administration gave to its library as well as the institution's political strength and influence in obtaining funding from the North Carolina General Assembly. The natural outgrowth of this highly political process was a lack of equity in funding among the institutions and inadequate support of libraries, both at the local and state levels. The smaller, less influential state-supported institutions all had inadequate library resources for the support of their instructional and research programs.

The work of the Board of Higher Education through ULAC has continued since 1972 under the Board of Governors and the UNC General Administration. An extensive and highly structured planning process resulted in state university libraries being a consistently high priority of both the Board of Governors and the North Carolina General Assembly, providing substantial financial support from 1969 until the current state economic slow-down. This strong support has resulted from studies by ULAC as well as consultants employed by the Board of Governors. The formula-based assumptions were developed in keeping with nationally recognized indicators and measures for library

resource allocation for college and research libraries. The formula-based assumptions were also matched with a set of enrollment assumptions for each university.⁷

Most recently ULAC has also focused its efforts on improving access to resources and services at the institutions in The University of North Carolina through automation and computer communication network-

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ing. Although the Automation/Networking Committee is assigned specific responsibility for coordinating this effort, all committees of ULAC—Budget, Cooperative Issues, Personnel, and Statistics—have been assigned responsibilities which have a direct impact on its successful implementation.

Coordinated planning for library development of The University of North Carolina has resulted in equitable funding and increased annual library expenditures during nearly every biennium since 1972 for each of the sixteen institutions and has led to significant progress for resource sharing through cooperative programs and through the North Carolina Information Network administered by the State Library of North Carolina. The work of ULAC has provided significant results in improving library resources for support of instructional and research programs, although increasing costs of library materials and technological developments and current economic constraints have seriously eroded the value of the state's financial support of its university libraries.

Economic and Technological Forces

The major forces that have had a significant impact on the political environment of The University of North Carolina libraries can be categorized as economic and technological in nature. Much is being communicated by the academic library leaders,

both locally and nationally, about the stringent times in which libraries are operating. They have cited three major causes: escalating cost of materials and services, shrinking budgets, and the impact of new technologies on library operations and in information handling.⁸

Nearly all national library leaders are predicting that during the next decade a dramatic transition away from manufacturing of printed products will result in the distribution of instructional and scholarly information through a variety of media formats.⁹ The mission of the research university is changing in response to the use of new electronic technology.¹⁰ The communication and computing network technologies are forcing the development of a restricted knowledge communications infrastructure for universities and a re-examination of institutional missions. The research paradigm is changing because the electronic communication networks allow more emphasis on "the invisible college" as a means for reporting results rather than full published research outcomes. These are all highly political forces because they affect long held assumptions and values upon which goals, objectives, and programs of the university libraries have been based.

All economic indicators at this time would suggest that the financial situation will not significantly improve nor will the purchasing power of the dollar increase or even remain stable. If The University of North Carolina receives a modest reduction in budget allocation or even a modest increase, the University's libraries are still going to be faced with significantly diminished purchasing power for materials. The consequences of reducing purchasing power might well lead to homogenous collections and a loss of the current levels of quality in the state's research collections, especially if the traditional academic and research library assumptions are not changed.

Another political complication resulting from the move toward electronic information is the issue of who manages or provides the leadership for the electronic communication channels for information handling, the library or the computer center.¹¹ The state legislature might well get involved in this issue unless there is careful and visionary planning by the administrators of the University libraries and computer centers.¹² An added political dimension might result at the campus level as administrators and faculty determine the priority in funding the mechanism for providing adequate access to shared library resources through the proposed University of North Carolina Library Network, the North Carolina Information Network, the North Carolina Integrated Network, and the National Research and Education Network/Internet. These forces have caused ULAC to examine and study ways to maintain adequate library resources to support The University of North Carolina's instructional and research programs.

North Carolina's research university libraries must re-think fundamental and treasured assumptions. Failure to do this will have negative academic and political consequences. These treasured assumptions include:

1. The best libraries are those with the most physical resources and greatest number of monographs and active serials.
2. Libraries must buy comprehensively across all disciplines to assure that some unknown title purchased today will be available when needed at some point in the future.
3. Ownership is the ideal and desirable situation.
4. It is more cost effective to own everything that might be needed than to expend resources only on what is needed at the time it is needed.

The problem is especially significant because the current assumptions have been presented so convincingly to legislatures, employers, alumni, and private donors, that changing them will require some serious planning and effective communication with the legislature and other constituencies as was done in 1969 and 1972.

Reality Shifts

Physical ownership of collections falls in the basic human need category; therefore, the political motivation is very strong to look with pride at very large collections. Although some university libraries are having problems in maintaining large collections and there is much discussion of cooperative or coordinated collection development, the traditional paradigm for acquisition of materials is still in place. Will ULAC make the reality shift to a more effective plan for using the electronic format and communication channels for on-demand access? Or to a more effective means of managing limited financial resources for collection development?

The economic and technological conditions suggest that a more systematic plan for collection development could guide funding and budget allocation. The criteria for such a plan would be: collect to satisfy the greatest number of local users, collect to satisfy known immediate and future need, and collect as part of a shared state and national collection plan. Will ULAC make the reality shift to more effective criteria for collection development and budget allocation?

A major political issue might be how to divide and assign responsibility, particularly to those academic libraries that support external research and governmental users as well as some information needs for the general public. Another political issue is who will experience the benefits when using what resources. Members of ULAC and other leaders have rightly expressed concern about how access to the benefits of networked information resources and services is obtained.¹³ Will ULAC serve as a model for designing a set of criteria in keeping with their institutions' assigned functions and programs? Will ULAC again take on the issue of how best to deliver the information? Will ULAC recognize that the current interlibrary loan system is much

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too slow as a backup strategy in the resources sharing paradigm?

Another issue which is probably the most political internal question for ULAC is how to embed networked information resources and services into the research and teaching communities. Will ULAC take on the issues of how to refit institutional and organizational facilities, how to reallocate institutional and organizational budgets, and how to re-educate professional and support personnel?

Summary and Implications

The University of North Carolina receives a significant portion of the state's budget. The state budget is derived from a highly political process; therefore, the University is a significant entity in state politics. The University libraries are affected by state politics but not as much during previous years because of the high priority given to adequate library resources by the Board of Governors and the University-wide administrators. ULAC was very effective in communicating needs directly to the Legislature through the Board of Governors because of excellent research, evaluation, and planning which resulted in a convincing case for financial support for library resources.

Most recently, severe financial pressures and technological developments are forcing university officials to re-think institutional priorities. The economic climate and structural changes will have a significant impact on the political environment in which The University of North Carolina libraries seek funding for adequate resources to support instructional and research programs. Although ULAC appears to be making positive efforts in consolidating the gains of technological advancement, additional support from the UNC General Administration and the Board of Governors is needed. Support is needed to conduct some studies of how national and state structural changes have affected current assumptions that guide the budgetary process for

The University of North Carolina libraries, as well as for each institution's own internal allocation process for library resources. The recent mission review of The University suggests that a significant window of opportunity exists to seek support for an in-depth study of the statewide library resources and access needs within the context of the proposed revision of the state hierarchy for higher education. The needs of The University libraries must be viewed in the context of the current crisis in the scholarly communication infrastructure¹⁴ and participation in the electronic information access environment of the North Carolina Information Network, the North Carolina Integrated Network,¹⁵ National Research and Education Network/Internet, the Coalition for Networked Information,¹⁶ and others.

Reference and Notes

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²David Shavit, "The Politics of the State Budgetary Process and Library Funding," in E. J. Josey and Kenneth D. Shearer, eds., *Politics and the Support of Libraries*, (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1991), p. 87.

³The description of the governance structure of The University of North Carolina in this article is based on Chapter II of *Long-Range Planning, 1986-1991*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Board of Governors, 1987), pp. 11-23.

⁴*A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987).

⁵Speller, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶A full description of the budgetary procedures for the state of North Carolina based on constitutional authority is presented in the *Budget Manual*, (Raleigh, North Carolina: State of North Carolina, Office of State Budget and Management), Section 2, pp. 1-14.

⁷An historical description of long-range planning for support of libraries of The University of North Carolina is presented by I. T. Littleton, "Planning and Funding For Public University Libraries in North Carolina," *North Carolina Libraries*, (Fall 1978): 30-37.

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¹⁵State Information Processing Services, *Information Resources Management (IRM) Strategic Direction, FY 1991-92*, Raleigh, NC: State of North Carolina, Information Technology Commission, 1991.

¹⁶The Coalition for Networked Information is an activity of the Association of Research Libraries, CAUSE, and EDUCOM. The mission of the entity is to promote the creation of and access to information resources in networked environments in order to advance scholarship and intellectual productivity.

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