

## REFERENCE SERVICE IN THE JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARY

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The Junior College as a form of higher education is gradually finding itself firmly implanted within the educational pattern of America, and of our own state. This has not been a chance happening. It is an outgrowth of a deeply felt need for the unique contributions which a good junior college program is equipped to bring to the educational system. The uniqueness is summed up very appropriately in the name which is now commonly given to the junior college, that of "community college" which best describes the clientele forming the student body of the junior college.

First of all, there are the lower division preparatory students who are attending junior college as a springboard toward a four-year degree, and will later transfer to a senior college or university. This naturally necessitates a strong "university parallel" curriculum in the junior college to meet transfer requirements of the four-year universities.

The next group of students served by the junior college are those enrolled in what is called "terminal education." For these people the junior college represents their last formal educational contact. Some of this group enroll in the regular general education courses, but particularly suited to the terminal education program are such semiprofessional curricula as business education, secretarial, nursing, commercial art, and various technical offerings.

Then there is the opportunity for continuing education offered to the adult population of the community by the junior college. In this group we find people returning to college because of change of vocational objectives, interest in new technological

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developments, or because of the urge for mental stimulation and enrichment. This continuing education phase of junior college development has experienced an almost phenomenal growth in the past few years, and has brought into being strong evening programs within the junior college, offering a wide variety of practical and enrichment curricula.

These, then, are the primary functions and clientele of the junior college. If the modern ideal of a college library as the "heart" of the institution is to be realized, it follows, therefore, that the nature of the library found within the junior college must complement these aims and objectives. The junior college library is in an excellent position to fulfill this role, for, in the main, it is more closely supervised, has closer integration with the curriculum, and can provide more individualized attention for the students than is possible in a larger institution. For this very reason it is somewhat difficult to categorize the reference services of the junior college library, since they permeate throughout all of the library's activities.

### SERVICES

Typical of this type of service is the teaching function of the library. Here, as in any undergraduate division, come students with varied cultural and educational backgrounds. Some have already had good basic training in library skills, and others are neophytes in the book and library world. The paramount job, then, is to try to bring them all within a certain level of understanding. Consequently, much time is spent instructing in techniques which make for effective use of library resources. Much of this instruction is done informally as questions are brought to the circulation or reference desk—for example, inquiries concerning card catalog interpretation, or the use of the *Reader's Guide* and various other indexes and catalogs. Some sort of formal library instruction and orientation should also be a part of this teaching function of the library. It is difficult to say which of the various methods devised for presenting such instruction is the most beneficial. It is largely a matter dependent on local situation, the ingenuity of the librarians, and the relationship between the librarians and the faculty.

The more conventional type of reference service offered by the junior college library involves the location of sources for research papers, and class assignments requiring the use of library materials. Here it should be emphasized that nothing will aid both the librarian and the patron as much as the librarian's complete familiarity with the reference collection at hand. It may also be noted that reference questions have a way of reappearing at certain times each year. It is prudent, therefore, to keep a file of the most difficult-to-trace items, indicating the sources where material can or cannot be found.

### COLLECTION

Thus far, emphasis has been placed on the types of reference service offered by the junior college library. It is evident, however, that this service must be supported by a strong, well-balanced collection of reference materials. The reference collection need not necessarily be a large one to be most useful. The prime consideration is wise selection, keeping always in mind the aims of the parent institution, the content of the courses offered in the curriculum, and the teaching methods of the faculty members. The library staff should be responsible for seeing that the best and most current general tools are available. This may be accomplished through perusal of current book selection aids, and such basic reference book lists as are found in Bertalan's *Books for Junior Colleges*, Shores' *Basic Reference Sources*, and Winchell's *Guide to Reference*

*Books.* In the various specialized subject areas where there may be some doubt as to the value of adding certain items, we should rely heavily on the suggestions of the teaching faculty.

In addition to the good general encyclopedias, yearbooks, dictionaries, and indexes, it has been our experience that the most frequently used reference materials in the junior college library are those biographical in nature. We lean heavily on such tools as *Biography Index*, *Current Biography*, *Who's Who in America*, *Twentieth Century Authors* and its *First Supplement*, *American Men of Science*, and many other biographical aids. Other reference items frequently used are *Short Story Index*, *Essay and General Literature Index* and *Book Review Digest*. It should be pointed out, however, that these indexes are of little value unless there is on the library's shelves a goodly representation of the books and magazines indexed therein. The list of books covered by such indexes can also serve as a buying guide in building up the reference collection in needed areas. We recently found *Biography Index* an invaluable aid in purchasing volumes of collected biography.

A good junior college reference department of course does not rely entirely on books and periodicals to meet demands. A well-organized vertical file containing articles of current and local importance can be of great help, as can files of maps and pictures. Modern reference practice also presupposes that there will be available equipment for projecting such non-book materials as films, filmstrips, and slides, as well as machines to be used for phonographic and tape recordings. If used properly such media can greatly enrich the regular teaching procedure.

We should not leave the discussion of the reference functions of the junior college library without mention of vocational guidance. There is a great demand by counselors and students for a readable and usable collection of occupational informational material. This might well grow into a separate collection within the reference department, readily available to all.

Since there is very little advanced research activity in the junior college library, we do not often find it necessary to request interlibrary loans, but there are occasions when the use of interlibrary loan is a great boon in supplying material for faculty members on specialized subjects, or in filling some rather unusual student request which is not available in the local library.

The junior college reference department should also be familiar with the content of other reference collections available within the community, in the event it should be necessary to refer a request to one of these sources.

The relationship between the library staff and the faculty is another important factor contributing to good reference service in the junior college library. We cannot overemphasize the value of cooperative contacts with faculty members in all subject areas, so that the library staff may have firsthand knowledge of the content of courses, teaching methods, and what is expected of the students. This pays dividends many times over in both efficiency and public relations, when the librarian is able to supply just the right book at the right time.

The role of the junior college administration in efficient library service also comes to our attention. It is through close cooperation with administrative officers that mutual understandings are reached which culminate in strong support for the library, as well as in the establishment of library policies compatible with the functions and philosophies of the institution as a whole.

From the foregoing description it seems evident that the reference services of the junior college library are many and all-encompassing, but at the same time richly

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rewarding. This philosophy is aptly expressed in the motto which has become a watchword at St. Petersburg Junior College, "Life is worth learning." We should like every one of our students to cultivate a knowledge of library materials and habits of reading and research which will carry over pleasantly and effectively into all phases of life.

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