

Knowledge discovered among quiet of stacks

By James Fitzroy

"Libraries tend to be a little hard to talk about," said Dr. Charles Townley, Head Librarian of Capitol Campus' Heindel Library, with a touch of understatement.

"Simply stated," he explained, "the primary mission of any library is to provide access to recorded information needed by the people it serves."

"We go about doing that by acquiring material, organizing it, cataloging it. We also provide assistance in delivering that material. We constantly evaluate ourselves and make plans to improve ourselves. That's the role of a library."

The reality that underlies this definition is studded with complexities. Funding and physical space are continuing problems for the library faculty.

"One simply, finally, has to make the decision of what you're going to spend your money on," said Townley. "In our case we have accreditation to worry about, both in Business and Technology. So we've been spending money there and those collections have been improving. The technology section has to be con-

stantly updated.

"What has not been improving is that each year since I've been here we've ended the year less able to meet the needs of the people we serve. Though I can say that this year we'll end up at least as well as we started," he added.

"That's in the book area. We're still way behind in periodicals." Heindel Library, "does well budget wise within the University library system," according to Townley, but "our collection is becoming increasingly antiquated."

He sees hope, though, of help from University President Bryce Jordan.

"For example, with some funds that turned up unexpectedly unspent in the budget--'whoopie money,' it's called--he used it on the libraries. Previous presidents had never done that."

Townley expects this trend to continue.

"The new president is very aware that the budget allocations have to change. He is serious about it. I believe he's going to put more money into computers and all those things you have to spend money on if you're going to call yourself a research university."

"We ended up with a fair addition of monies this year," he

added, "a substantial amount for recorded information."

Recorded information means books, articles, documents and technical reports, according to Townley. It also includes microfilm, microfiche, audio tapes and recordings.

"Libraries used to be people, money and books. Now we have automation, people, money and recorded information; the formula has changed. Automation is a great resource of great assistance."

The use of microcomputers and the various microforms is a temporary answer to the problem of space at Capitol's library.

During the 1982--1983 fiscal year, the Online Database Information Network (O.D.I.N.) was established, with the Heindel Library joining in a local network of eight libraries, enhancing the library's ability to provide access to information, according to that year's annual report.

"We have access to over 300 machine-related databases," Townley said. "These include Dialog, CompuServe and The Source. The use of these on-line services are valuable in locating material that might otherwise remain unknown."

"If things go according to plan this library will be fitted with the Library Information Access System (L.I.A.S.) within two years. There is a lot of automation coming into the library and there's more and more digital information becoming available."

Heindel is the only library in south central Pennsylvania to own "Envirofiche," a collection of 75,000 articles and technical reports covering all aspects of environment and pollution control. A similar database, "Energyfiche," contains 25,000 pieces covering all trends in energy research and development.

The library stores over 700,000 microforms available to students, along with the equipment to read and copy the material recorded on them.

But what's a library without books? Well, Heindel has 170,000 of those in its collection, 6,300 of which were cataloged last year.

Despite these numbers, Townley reports that the collection is "continuing its slow slide into obsolescence." To offset this, his 1982--1983 fiscal report states that the Heindel budget would have to be increased 60 percent.

"Problems remain in using the existing facility to meet library and information needs. Shelving is at a premium and unless more is provided we shall soon have to begin discarding books," according to the report, and, "all of this points to the critical need for a permanent library facility ready for occupancy in 1988/1989."

In accord with the staff's emphasis on "people services"--of guidance to the library's resources--they have designed what Townley described as "mimicking things" in order to improve the reference service.

These include formulating a list of "the 150 most asked questions, along with their answers," to be referred to by student assistants when there are no faculty members around to answer them. The questions and answers will soon be available at the circulation and periodicals desks.

The staff has also prepared printed instructions on how to use some of the basic reference material. These will be glued inside the front covers of the guide to the use of the library.

In a year or two, Townley hopes to have complete bibliographies stored in a microcomputer for student use in a self-teaching format. "Again, all we would be doing there would be the mimicking of a reference librarian--in effect, adding to the faculty."


Libraries may tend to be hard to begin talking about, but when the conversation and exploration begin--when the noise of the knowledge is discovered among the quiet of the stacks--it's even harder to stop talking about them.

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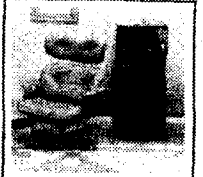
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