

THE PROBLEM OF THE BLANK CHEQUE

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Mr. B. U. Nwafor
University Librarian, Jos.

When, in August 1976, I assumed duty as University Librarian of the University of Jos, I saw the challenge of my new office as not unlike that of a person presented with a blank cheque. All he needed to do was to write a figure into the blank space. But the trouble is, just how much should be written? The correct answer, of course, is the **right** figure. Which is?

But perhaps it is not exactly true to say that I was presented with a blank cheque for I was not to build the library from scratch. The nucleus of the Unijos Library came into being in February, 1972 with the founding of the Jos Campus of the University of Ibadan, an institution which subsequently (in 1975) became the autonomous University of Jos. Thus, an organized library collection already existed in temporary quarters, and run by staff of about 20 including a professional librarian. A number of procedures had been introduced and policies made. Still, theoretically speaking, I had the power, I think, to drastically change all the procedures, reverse the policies and even write off the entire collection on the basis of irrelevance, etc. if I had considered this line of action necessary.

Generally, my task was to fashion out the appropriate policies, draw up procedures and set up the necessary machinery for the provision of an **efficient** library service for the nascent University of Jos. In achieving the above, I had to decide on whether to rely mostly or solely on my own ability or tap the expertise of my colleagues. I suppose in an ideal setting (and here one is reminded of those fine lectures in the library schools) it would have been proper to begin the planning of a programme for the organisation and administration of the University Library by referring to official documents stating the objectives of the University of Jos or at least indicating what was expected of its Library. Unfortunately, no such documents existed prior to 28 September, 1979 when the **Act** establishing the University was promulgated. That **Act** stated that the University Librarian "shall be responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the administration of the University Library and the co-ordination of all the library services in the University and its campuses ..."

As to be expected, I had perceived my situation in 1976 as an opportunity to translate into practical terms my dreams of an ideal academic library. It wasn't unlike the position of a young lady about to become a mother. Earlier she had held certain mental images of how she would bring up her baby: there are certain qualities she would strive to inculcate in it and others which must be avoided like the plague.

Experience in and observations of the Nigerian academic library scene by me over the years, which showed that library resources were invariably under-used, recommended one policy around which the

organisation and administration of the Unijos Library would revolve, namely, the Library should be such that its resources and facilities would be maximally used. In the drawing up of the Library policy and procedures, in the structuring of the organisation and adoption of an administration model for the Library, in the choice of a building plan, the hiring of staff, and contributions to discussions on the academic programmes of the University, **USE** of the library collection shall govern the stance of the Library Administration.



Mr. B. U. Nwafor

Let us try to be specific. And lest we forget, the primary objective of this paper is to spell out the direction this Library should be going. In other words, to state in some detail the various policies and procedures which would govern its development and which should be made known to all who work towards the achievement of its objectives and the University's. It can be said that some of these policies and procedures have already been stated or implied in some of our official pronouncements and actions while others are either in the making or will be evolved with time. The **Annual Reports** we have been producing over the years, **JULIA**, our bi-monthly news bulletin and accessions list, **Know Your Library; the readers' guide to the Library**, the University Librarian's brief for the architects, the various papers prepared for either the consideration of the Library Board (e.g. the Adoption of a Teaching Library Concept by the Unijos Library) or the Senate (e.g. Adoption of a common Bibliographical Style in the University of Jos), the forums provided by the various meetings we hold in the Library, the internal memoranda to staff — all these have been employed as media for articulating Library policies and procedures.

PRIMARY LIBRARY OBJECTIVES

In the University Librarian's brief for the architects, we gave the primary objective of the University Library to be "to provide materials and facilities which will enhance the achievement of the teaching and research programmes of the University ... in a cost-benefit context". As it stands, the above appears laudable but somewhat passive. Given the fact that some of our teaching faculty and almost all of the students are not serious library patrons, it falls on the Library administration to devise a machinery for the practical translation of the Library objective. Our concern, therefore, lies as much in the use made of the resources we provide as in seeing to it that those resources positively advance the teaching/learning/research interests of the Library clientele. It is in view of this that the University Library adopted the teaching library concept, described in some detail under the section on Government and Organisation below.

If use of the collection is the pivot on which all other library operations revolve, it is important to state that while the library can encourage use from its end through, for example, the selection of appropriate materials and provision of a conducive environment, and other facilities, there are certain factors which lie outside the control of the Library administration, but vitally constitute a *sine qua non* for the maximum exploitation of those resources and facilities. One has in mind, for example, the teaching method in use in the University. President Spencer of Sengamon State University has ably phrased this problem: "if ... the teaching style of an institution is primarily textbook-oriented rather than source- or literature-oriented, the library will find little use. Similarly, if teaching styles do not provoke curiosity or stimulate the search for answers, students are not likely to be library users."

It is seen as the responsibility of the library administration, therefore, to try its utmost to influence the adoption of a teaching method in the University such as will de-emphasise text book teaching, encourage students to be inquisitive and equip them with the capability to find information by themselves. Furthermore, the Library has a responsibility to teach/guide its patrons on how best to exploit its resources, and those of other libraries and information systems. But more of this later.

GOVERNMENT AND ORGANISATION

The best thought-out policy is unlikely to materialize if the appropriate climate for its germination and flourishing does not exist. This University Library's policies are not exception. But let me hasten to state that the Library enjoys good relationship with both the administration and other arms of the University. As you no doubt know, the University Librarian is one of the principal officers of the University and reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor or sometimes to the Library Board, a body charged with the responsibility for:

- (a) the formulation of general policies on the development of the Library as a centre of learning and research;

- (b) making regulations governing the use of Library.

Membership of the Library Board is drawn from the faculties (one representative per faculty) and the student population. An active Board would serve as a sounding board for the Library and a platform for evaluating the services offered by the library. It should also serve as a medium through which the Library informs the university community of the problems encountered by it. Senior academicians need to form the bulk of its membership.

The Librarian is, in addition, a member of most University committees in which both academic and non-academic matters are discussed. Mention need to be made in particular of the Library's membership of the Faculty/Institute Boards - considered to be an important forum for informed dialogue between our major customers and us. The Library's representatives at these Board meetings have been selected invariably on the basis of staff's subject qualifications and/or interest.

In the dichotomy of the University into academic and administrative divisions, the Library is classed with the former and thus its professional staff are treated as academic staff.

Undoubtedly, one of the major issues which faced this administration was the choice of an effective organisational model which would facilitate the achievement of the library goals. Our staff strength and other infrastructural factors had initially compelled us to adopt our present pattern in which we have the following departments: Administration, Acquisitions, Technical Processing, Readers' Services, and Serials and Documents. However, our ultimate aim is to change to a subject departmentalized form of organisation. In this arrangement, the Library will be divided broadly into two divisions, namely: Subject Libraries Division and Support Services Division, with the latter servicing the former (cf. the University's Administrative Division servicing the Academic Division) and yet not being in any way inferior to it. Amongst the reasons for preferring this type of organization are:

- (a) it allows for the maximum utilization of staff expertise and other qualities: professional staff will be assigned to professional tasks while non-professional staff will handle mostly routine tasks.
- (b) the majority of the professional staff will be charged with the following functions:
 - (i) collection development in a specific discipline or disciplines;
 - (ii) provision of reference and information services in the given field/s;
 - (iii) liaison with the relevant teaching department/s from which they monitor closely the academic programmes of the department/s;
 - (iv) mounting of user education programmes.
- (c) it subjects or rather exposes the professional staff to vigorous academic drilling from which, it is hoped, they not only would derive personal satisfaction

but by satisfying their clientele convincingly prove that our claim to academic status is based on fact rather than myth.

It is envisaged that subject librarians (that is, librarians in-charge of subject libraries) should be able to command salaries ranging from GL.09 to 14 (in the context of the prevailing salary structure). Since subject librarians shall be performing some administrative duties in the course of running their departments, it is hoped that this structuring will in no way work against their chances when competing with other people for top management positions in libraries.

Subject libraries will be established on faculty basis generally but in addition, there will be a general reference, bibliography and serials section, government documents and special collections section, and, possibly, an audio visual section. Specialized reference books, bibliographies, serials and audio visual materials will be shelved in the appropriate subject libraries.

The support services division, on the other hand, will embrace departments such as Administration, Orders, Gifts and Exchanges, Materials Processing, Bindery, Systems, and Reprography. Excepting for the Materials Processing Department, librarians will not normally work in these areas. Nonetheless, the staff of these departments, by virtue of the nature of their responsibilities, should attract salaries almost commensurate with what their counterparts in the subject libraries earn. One's output rather than qualifications per se will determine one's salary.

Deputy University Librarians will be appointed as the library grows bigger to assist the University Librarian in the administration of the Library.

Still on the organisation of the Library, it is worth noting that the National Universities Commission in its **Standards Guide for Universities** discouraged the establishment of departmental libraries in Nigeria's new universities. This means in effect, that a central University Library building has to be planned for this University. Pre-occupied with ensuring that the services and resources we provide are used, the Library administration had initially considered the spine type of library building which seems to combine the advantages of departmental and central libraries literally under one roof. However, after a detailed examination of this model in the light of our unique circumstance, it was abandoned and in its place the conventional type of central library building was preferred. The new building has now been designed to be located physically at the centre of the University, house half a million volumes of books, accommodate over 2,000 readers and comprise four floors.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

It has been stated that management is the ability to use people to accomplish clear-and- pre-stated set of objectives. It follows that the duty of the manager or administrator is to seek and recruit people who will deliver the desired goods. In return, the staff should

be provided with a conducive environment in which to work and the necessary tools for their work. In the matter of administration and management, the Library administration subscribes to certain views that may be said to be its credo. These include:

- (a) that however wise or intelligent an individual might be, he cannot claim universal knowledge nor claim to have the solutions to all problems. Hence the Library administration buys the idea of participatory management. Witness the Library Cabinet (monthly meeting of all heads of library departments), general staff meetings, etc.
- (b) that apparent honesty, the principle of equity and fair play and absence of vindictive tendencies and suspicion are pre-requisites for healthy inter-personal relationships. Staff are encouraged to behave to each other as if they all belong to one family;
- (c) that no one member of staff is more important than the other and as such each member of staff represents a link in the Library chain;
- (d) that the criteria recognized for purposes of promotion are high productivity, and good behaviour. The policy of 'hire and fire' otherwise labelled "shape up or shake out" is in force here. Staff will be continuously assessed;
- (e) that it is recognised that the domestic/private life of each member of staff has a direct bearing on his job performance. Accordingly, staff are encouraged to discuss their non-official problems with trusted members of the staff, if they so desire;
- (f) that staff without healthy ambition for future advancement may not fit into our setting. Staff members are thus counselled in this respect;
- (g) that as we work towards the achievement of the Library goals we should not forget we are at the same time contributing towards the accomplishment of national goals. Accordingly, we believe that while we cannot directly correct the short-comings of some of the public agencies, we can assist indirectly by providing an exemplary effective and efficient service to our patrons and through this, hopefully, influence their attitude to work. In effect, we would like to demonstrate through the services we provide that
 - (i) a public institution in Nigeria can give good service, and
 - (ii) a Nigerian can work as hard and courteously as his counterpart anywhere in the world.
- (h) that job satisfaction is as important a remuneration as monetary and other rewards for the staff;
- (i) that in the execution of tasks, the advantages of time and motion studies and cost-benefit analysis should be utilized;
- (j) that this administration will be an open administration: the University Librarian is

always willing to welcome staff and patrons who have genuine need to meet with him.

FINANCES

The existence of adequate funding and judicious utilization of same, constitute a pre-requisite for the development of an effective library service. Apart from the Library's share of the University revenues, (5% of the Recurrent Vote), the Library administration should also seek ways of raising additional money e.g. through donations or obtaining materials either free of charge or at reduced costs.

COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT

If the main focus of the library is the use made of its collection, implicit in this statement is that relevant items needed by patrons already existed in both adequate number and quality. Central to the success of the library's primary goal, therefore, lies its collection development capability. As we have tried to state elsewhere, the Unijos Library would rather be known by the relevance of its collection than by its sheer size. Thus, bigger to us does not always mean better.

A collections development policy is already in existence but like all guidelines in use in a dynamic institution, it will require periodical review. Meanwhile, the Library is striving to elicit the maximum co-operation of the teaching faculty in the book selection effort. Its organization on subject departmental basis in which the subject librarian is responsible for co-ordinating book selection in the area/s of the Library for which he is responsible ensures that, as much as possible, only relevant materials are acquired. Naturally, we procure materials relevant to the teaching and research functions of the University as well as, of course, the general education of our patrons. In instances where we stand to benefit, we shall be prepared to join co-operative acquisition programmes. The Nigerian Universities-backed co-operative acquisition of African Government documents is a case in point.

Because of the routinized nature of a good number of operations in the orders section, it will be one of the sections of the Library to qualify for consideration for computerization once we have a computer facility on the campus.

MATERIALS ORGANIZATION

Again if use is our watchword, it follows that the Library collection has to be organised in such a way as to allow for its easy accessibility and retrieval.² Both the Library of Congress classification scheme and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules are in use in the Library. Also the A.L.A. filing rules are employed. If we could get all our books and selected materials catalogued at source, so much the better. True, such cataloguing might deviate slightly to the point of not reflecting "our uniqueness" but it is assumed that if our correct profile had been fed to the managers of the cataloguing service, the extent of departure from our practice will be minimal. The Library would not favour extensive modifications to

cards received from centralized cataloguing centres.

About 70% of the materials processed in our Library comes from outside Nigeria and perhaps 90% of this lot comes from the western part of the world where centralized cataloguing centres e.g. MARC exist. The remaining 30% or so of our accessions originate from Nigeria. Not long ago, the possibility of establishing a centralized cataloguing service in Nigeria for publications emanating from this country was mooted. If this were to materialize, and we are to subscribe to it, in addition to an overseas cataloguing service, there would be little need for more than one or two librarians to work in our technical processing department. We are saying, in effect, that cataloguing is becoming increasingly routinized and that the need for original cataloguing is decreasing correspondingly.

The space occupied by catalogue cabinets, the cost of maintaining the card catalogue, and the difficulty in maintaining more than one public card catalogue in a large library point to the need to explore, in the near future, the possibility of converting our card catalogue to COM catalogue. The arrangement of our Library on subject department basis additionally recommends this.

In future both the Acquisitions Department and the Technical Processing Department will cease to exist in their present form. Materials selection would have been transferred to subject librarians and what is left of the work of the Acquisitions Department would be merged with both serials receipt and processing and the present technical services activities. The name of the emerging department would remain the Technical Processing Department.

SERIALS & DOCUMENTS DEPARTMENT

Both serials and documents were originally brought under the same management because of the age of the library and the paucity of professional staff. As hinted above, serials receipt and checking functions will, in future, be transferred to the Technical Services Department. Documents and any special collections we may have will become a new Department. We had also stated earlier that there would be no separate serials collection in the library like now but that serials will form part of either the General or the Special (subject) collections. At the first opportunity, serials ordering and checking will be computerized.

The majority of the backsets of serials will be on microform and issues of serials bound and otherwise are to be shelved out with books. The danger of mutilation and even loss cannot be over-emphasized. Measures will, however, be taken to minimize if not to stop these. Serials will not be on closed access; not if use remains our emphasis.

Our documents collection may be an exception to our general policy to arrange materials by subject rather than by form. A further study of this is necessary to see if documents must remain the exception.

THE USER

Our concern for the reader would border on indulgence. Being the customer, he will always remain right. As stated earlier, the organisational arrangement of the Library on subject basis has its focus as the reader. Instead of the all-knowing animal, otherwise christened the reference librarian, whom we had been conditioned to believe could answer reference inquiries on **all** aspects of knowledge, we shall designate subject librarians who would offer more or less personalized reference and information services to smaller groups of people with a common subject interest. It will also fall on the subject librarian to offer user education programmes (at two levels now) to students. It is further envisaged that seminars on effective utilization of the wealth of the library would be offered by the subject librarian for the benefit of the relevant teaching faculty.

In serving the reader, we shall not only depend on our own resources but on sources outside of our environment. The reader should also be kept continually informed of developments in the literature of his subject field, and be provided with a conducive environment for the pursuit of his inquiry or study.

While reference services will be de-centralized, the circulation system will remain centralized. The present manual system would need to be computerized when the computer becomes available on campus. Meanwhile, we should begin gradually to critically examine some of our present operations with a view to ensuring their easy conversion to non-manual methods when the time is due.

It shall behove the staff in direct contact with the library patrons to be both tidy and courteous yet firm and non-partisan or nepotic. Shelf-reading duties must be seen in a different light from what they are today for a book shelved out of place when needed is as good as a book not in stock.

The best advertisement of the services offered by any organisation lies in the quality of that service rendered to its patrons. The library's advertisement spot is its reference desk and circulation counter, and the evaluation of the library's effectiveness takes place here. It follows that staff working in these places represent the library's first set of public relations officers: the other set is the library administration which uses both the forums provided by the various University committee meetings in which the University Librarian sits to inter-relate with the community, and the medium of our bulletin and other library publications to inform our patrons about the services and activities we provide.

Realising that every normal human being, but especially members of a University community, has informational and educational needs, our target would be to get as many members of our community as possible to come to an appreciation of the rich resources of the library with a view to their eventually using them.

STAFF

If we had discussed the user first, it is not because the staff is any less important when considering the

library trinity of staff, stock and reader. Given the fact therefore that the staff forms the third leg of the tripod on which the library service rests, it follows that extreme care must be given to their selection. The goals we have set for ourselves demand knowledgeable and enthusiastic people, possessing different types of expertise ranging from what it takes to be an expert subject librarian to a good cleaner. Beyond skills, we shall require of our staff the right type of attitude to work.

Broadly speaking, four groups of staff would be needed to man our Library:

- (a) the professional cadre - invariably holders of degrees in library science, or other subjects and professional qualifications in library science. They attend to professional tasks in the library, run a salary scale from GL.08 to GL.16, are designated from Assistant Librarian to University Librarian and are academic staff. This cadre of staff are often not easy to come by;
- (b) the sub-professional cadre - those are holders of qualifications comparable to the diploma in library studies. They comprise the Library officer grade and run a beginning salary of GL.07 to GL.10/11 as Principal Library officer. In the organizational structure we are proposing, this group of people may, through the amount and level of work they perform, rise up to GL.14. They are library's equivalent of the military NCOs!
- (c) other senior staff - these are professionals in their own right and are to be found in such areas as the Bindery, Systems, Administration, etc;
- (d) the junior staff cadre - comprising the rest of the library staff working in different capacities and on salaries ranging from GL.01 to 06.

If we expect staff to give of their best, the library on its part should provide them with incentives necessary for job satisfaction. Accordingly, both for their self-development and to encourage them to greater productivity, the library, like its parent university, operates a staff development programme. In-service training programmes for the junior staff and in-house seminars for the senior staff will form part of the staff development programme. Beyond the above, the library sees the need for the provision of a staff rest room/canteen and establishment of a voluntary welfare scheme embracing all the staff.

At this point it is important to state the criterion or criteria on which advancement in the system depends. For the professional staff, the criteria used for their promotion would not be dissimilar to those used in assessing their teaching counterparts except that their work output would substitute for teaching load. But note that they have "to publish or perish" and that they are now entitled to four weeks research leave in the year. For the non-professional staff, work output is the main promotion criterion. It needs be repeated that considerations such as place of origin, 'connections', sex, etc. are totally extraneous in staff appraisal, which follows the open reporting system.

SERVICES

For the purpose of enhancing the utilization of the main services we provide, some ancillary facilities are deemed essential. Examples of these include photocopying, telephone, coffee bar, etc. If we could find coin-operated, average-sized and non-noise-making photocopying machines, we would prefer to have them located one per subject library, apart, of course, from the one to be housed in the work areas for library use. In the alternative, a central photocopying service will be provided. Again, if a public telephone booth and a cafeteria/snack bar are not close to the library, we shall attempt to provide them in the library for the use of our patrons.

Bindery facilities constitute yet another of the public services we can render. It is not unlikely that in the future both the bindery unit and the University press might merge and go commercial.

SECURITY

It will be recalled here that right from the earliest times preservation of materials had been one of the major functions of libraries. We owe a great responsibility to ensure the safety of the materials we acquire. Note, I used the collective plural 'we' and that I did not say it was the responsibility solely of the security staff. In the new library building, we shall explore the possibility of installing electronic security gadgets.

1980 AND AFTER

The Unijos Library shall not be an island. An enthusiastic, academically-bent staff would ensure

that developments in the library field, world-wide, are monitored and those of them found suitable for our needs implemented. Collectively, we need to condition ourselves for the enormous changes expected to take place in libraries. At the rate technology is impacting academic libraries it may be that in future, as it is being increasingly predicted, our society would become a paperless society. The implications for the Library would simply be enormous. The incredible capability of the computer serves as a clear pointer of things to come.

CONCLUSION

If I had had the crystal ball, I would not have chosen the above title for this paper: it would have been so easy knowing what to fill into my blank cheque. Thus, the direction I have attempted to map out does not so much constitute a blue print as set out the parameters for a serious reflection and discussion of the services we provide and shall be providing in the years ahead. Can we take up the gauntlet?

Thank you.

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