

Library's 'Subject-divisional' System Emulated

By Kay Matison

"The literature on university libraries contains numerous articles reinforcing or endorsing a particular form of organization. On the other hand, there are few pieces containing new and original ideas on how to organize books, the buildings which house them, and the people who work with them.

"As a result of this situation, certain model and prototype university libraries (e.g., the Lamont at Harvard (undergraduate); the Love at Nebraska (subject-divisional); and the Firestone at Princeton (interspersed) are picked out for seemingly endless discussion and imitation.

"Libraries such as these represent sort of the opinion-leading or 'avant-garde' element among university libraries. As resources permit, the lesser university libraries seek to emulate these building and organizational models." (THE LIBRARY QUARTERLY, January, 1962)

This is high praise for the University of Nebraska's Love Memorial Library, but what exactly is "subject-divisional?" It begins when large collections are brought together by subject matter to serve groups of related departments of instruction.

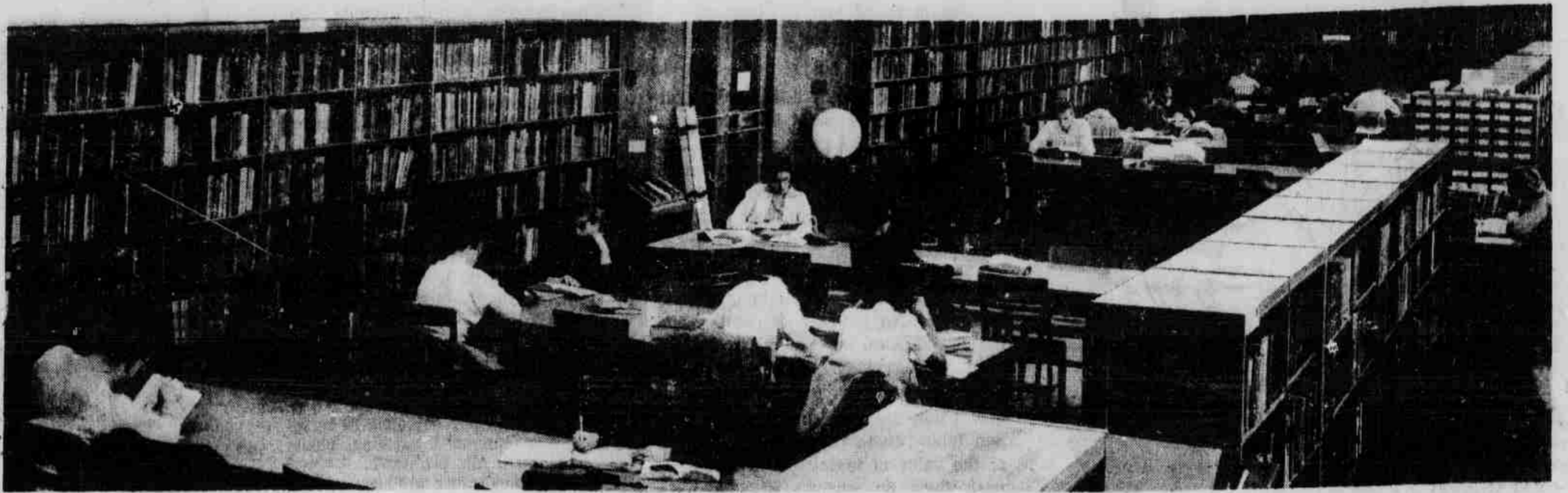
In the late 1930's, Ralph Ellsworth, then and now director of libraries at Colorado University decided that the only reasonable way to meet student and faculty demand for greater diversity of reading materials would be to divide the library's contents along three broad subject lines—social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences.

This was twenty-five years ago; the University of Nebraska followed five years later and developed the Colorado plan with a divisional library serving the humanities, the social studies, and sciences.

"This idea was not new at the time," says Frank Lundy, director of libraries at Nebraska, "the big public libraries, such as Los Angeles, California had been doing it for fifty years, but Colorado did build the first building in a large university designed for a major research collection."

Lundy stresses the fact that "the divisional plan refers to the scheme of organization, it is not a building plan."

At Nebraska one hundred thousand books and other materials were carefully selected for the subject-divisional purpose from the half million in the stacks and were arranged by content in a series of large reading rooms. The assigned readings are on open shelves in call number sequence with the rest of the collection. Shelving these books with the rest of the collection has the advantage of continuously acquainting the



SOCIAL SCIENCE READING ROOM—Students take advantage of Love Memorial Library's "subject-divisional" plan. This plan divides the library's contents into social science, humanities, and natural science. There is a reading room for each of these divisions.

student with other books on the same subject.

The reading rooms, which Lundy calls the student's "laboratory," are broken up into small study areas. These areas are surrounded with books on the same subject. The graduate students and faculty are not forgotten; there are sixteen seminars which serve as graduate study rooms and forty faculty studies which are separate rooms.

At Princeton and Northwestern, there are no divisional reading rooms, but the book stacks are open to all students. Of this Lundy says, "We believe that it is no service to the undergraduate student with a problem to solve or a paper to write to turn him loose among a million books consisting mostly of research materials."

According to Lundy, the completely open book stack in the large university is a "lazy man's way" of solving the problem of undergraduate library service. But no student at Nebraska is ever denied his right to browse among the stack collections if he wants to do so. (Although the situation is changing, on many campuses undergraduates are not given free access

to the book stacks.)

In the majority of libraries which have installed the subject-divisional plan, the centralization of materials in the social sciences and humanities has not been difficult; however, attempts to do the same with collections in the natural sciences have not been so easy.

Lundy explains, "The natural sciences are basic to many departments; whereas the chemistry department wants its own collection, then the microbiology students have to travel back and forth. Separating the natural sciences scatter books around for many departments."

The subject-divisional plan includes staffing and management, also. Director Lundy runs the library through the Library Council which is organized directly under him in the command structure, rather than off to the side in some sort of staff relationship.

The heads of the three Love Library divisions (social sciences, humanities, and science and technology) and the directors of the three outside division (agriculture, law, and medicine) all belong to the Library Council. Other outlying units are adminis-

tered exclusively through six individuals. For example, the assistant director for science would supervise the dentistry library.

The Library Council is a decision-making body and each of the six divisional librarians has a voice in the formulation of policy. There are ten library departments—the largest being agriculture, law and medicine.

At Nebraska all librarians members of the faculty and all have appropriate academic rank. Some fifteen or more are members of the University Senate. Some have achieved the rank of associate professor. A Master's degree is essential to being a librarian.

The "dual assignment" program operates at Nebraska.

Libraries that cannot afford to hire subject specialists for both reference and cataloging assign all available subject specialists to the divisional reading rooms where they both catalogue and do reference work.

There is currently a controversy over the degree to which reader service is improved through the location of subject specialists in the divisional reading rooms. For example, a specialist in American literature and fine arts in the humanities division cannot offer service in the other areas of foreign languages, music, religion and philosophy. An attempt to solve this problem at Nebraska has been to rotate

narrow subject specialists throughout a division until they acquire better divisional know-how.

A brief explanation should be given to the organization of the two libraries, Harvard and Princeton, which were cited along with Nebraska for superior leadership.

Harvard excels in the undergraduate library. Three major research libraries are maintained for graduate students and faculty. There are ninety other libraries in the Harvard complex. (Harvard's annual budget is three million dollars while Nebraska's is \$750,000.)

Princeton's interspersed plan operates with all library materials arranged in a logi-

cal subject order on open shelves with small reading areas scattered about. All possible space is free and able to be utilized. While fewer librarians seem to be needed, more reliance is placed on the clientele to acquire familiarity with the library plan.

What about the cost of the subject-divisional plan? It is not expensive. The cost is related to the size of the student body, to the length to the schedule of hours of service, and to the quality of service.

"The trouble is," says Lundy, "many libraries are trying to do too much with too few."

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