

Keeping up with technological advances: The Harriet Irving Library contemplates the challenges of the 90s

Allan Carter, Managing Editor of *The Brunswickan* speaks with John Teskey, Head of Libraries at the University of New Brunswick since the Fall of 1991 about the changing role of the library in the University Community. This interview was conducted on Monday March 30, 1992.

AC: In a paper submitted by John Neilson on *Book Preservation and the Environment* of the Harriet Irving Library, Mr Neilson makes it very clear that in order for the books to be saved from paper embrittlement, acid decay and to remain useable, the library needs "a cooler, more stable environment". The library closed down its air conditioning system in the mid 1970's, resulting in daytime temperatures which are too high for book preservation, particularly in the summer. Therefore, what steps, if any, has the library taken to preserve the books? If the solution is an efficient air conditioner, how optimistic are you about the old one being used again or a new one being installed?

JT: I have received preliminary figures from the Physical Plant regarding an estimate of the cost to bring a system back into operation. In the current fiscal climate I am not overly optimistic, but the case must be made and pressed forward.

AC: Briefly, could you explain how the quick loan system works, how it is beneficial to the students and then express where you think improvements can be made.

JT: Quickloan represents an agreement with a larger library so our library can be the library of first resort. If we try to fill as many requests for needed materials at one source, it becomes economically possible for us to ensure very timely delivery of materials. The University of Alberta library has maintained a historical stance of not charging fees for access to their collection. This position allows an institution such as UNB to then put staff in place as well as courier delivery. It is not really any different than UNB in Saint John having a staff member located here to handle requests which can be filled by this library.

The agreement illustrates that we recognize that we cannot meet all our requirements locally and that agreements such as the one with the University of Alberta will have to be put in place to meet our requirements. Technology is changing rapidly and a number of new products will provide a variety of alternatives to document delivery. One of these products is a software program called ARIEL. This will allow us to scan and send and receive articles over the internet.

So far the feedback from students about the quickloan system has been fairly positive and we have not had too many complaints. The population being served would include about sixty percent of undergraduate students who are taking advantage of the service. We actually are meeting the seventy two hour turn around to get the material available at Alberta. So, from that point of view, I would have to say it has been a success at this point.

The service is available at all the libraries on campus. On a daily basis, usage of the service is not even in terms of the number of request in each library, but overall it is spread across the campus. Quickloan is part of the circulation department. Thus a student can put in a request within any library in the system so you don't have to walk back and forth between libraries. When the material is received, it is sent to the respective library and puts it that much closer to the user and that was the intent.

AC: There was some possibility that the Grad Class would establish a library fund in order to help finance various expenditures at the library, ie: periodicals. In addition, some students believe that perhaps the Student Union should

develop a fund for the library. With consideration to the periodicals or any other expenditures, do you feel that the student body should make an attempt to address some of the library concerns? Were you disappointed when this year's grad class decided not to donate money to the library? If you do feel that the students have a responsibility and if it could be achieved through such funding bodies as the Student Union, Grad Class, Graduate Student Association, do you have any suggestions as to how they could help the library with respect to funding drives or trust funds? What areas of the library need immediate financial aid?

JT: I was very encouraged by the actions of several students to put the library on the list of potential projects. As you are aware the College Hill Social Club made a substantial donation to the library which allowed us to build a group study room on the second floor of the Harriet Irving Library and to add five printers to the PHOENIX catalogue, two in the Harriet Irving Library and one each in Science and Forestry, Engineering and the Education Resource Centre. This recognizes that the library is a student resource. The students are one of the largest stakeholders when one considers libraries. A con-

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siderable amount of your student career is spent in the library or using library materials. The better the library is in meeting your information requirements, the greater are your opportunities for success. It does seem to follow that if you are able to assist in improving library services students will benefit.

If we go back to your first question, in order to prepare a budget proposal to restore air conditioning to the Harriet Irving Library building an engineering study would be needed. Such a study would cost approximately \$10,000. This may be one item that students would see as being beneficial to their long term benefit.

AC: Concerning that engineering study, is it possible for an arrangement to be made with engineering students at UNB to do that study as an academic project?

JT: I don't know whether that is feasible or not. I know that computer science students at UNB have developed some software programs for the library. In terms of an engineering study you are getting into people having to sign names for confirmation of approval. It would be a little more difficult to use students in such a project because of legal reasons—certainly faculty would be capable of undertaking such a project.

AC: What other ways do you think the library could broaden the base of student participation in the library's developments (ie: besides financial aid)?

JT: There is a student representation on the Library User Committee and I have met with a few members of the Student Union executive on two occasions during the past term.

I met with the student at large and the vice president with regard to the circulation system. One of the problems that came up was that we had not made it specifically clear with signing that a person could request a separate slip for each item they checked out. Part of the complaint was that if the slip was only in one book, you didn't know which books were signed out for which period of time or what the due dates were. If you are borrowing books every couple of days, you can certainly get them mixed up. We like to see the information to the students, in terms of being able to check your status on a regular basis, made easy as possible.

Overall, I think the new system is a tremendous improvement to the manual system. There is teething problems with any of these systems and actually we have had so few problems that it is a credit to the people who were involved in the development of the new system.

I am not sure what other formal channels of communication are required. I feel it is important that students are able to question library activities and get a timely response. The meetings with members of the Student Union executive have provided a reasonable forum to discuss matters of mutual concern.

On a slightly different point, I feel it would be worthwhile to investigate whether a survey document similar to the Student Evaluation of Teaching form could be developed to provide feedback to the library regarding availability of resources and services related to specific courses.

Most feedback to the library is sort of hit and miss. I know we will probably be running a brief survey in *The Brunswickan* soon. Some of the general surveys that have been done are not very focused or directed as the teaching evaluation form is. By using such a method we could find out what type of services were available or not available for students. The feedback would be a little bit more direct and probably more useful in terms of planning and ongoing development. If our major mandate is one to support the teaching activities of the institution, then I think it is important to get feedback as to how much materials are available for academic courses. In such a survey we would have it divided up by disciplines so you can see how your money is being allocated and this would provide another useful area of feedback.

AC: One argument which was made with regard to the Grad Class project was the question of whether or not its funding would also help the science library. With regard to the smaller libraries on the campus. Do you recognize trouble spots in the other areas? What types? And how could you assure potential funding bodies like the Student Union, Grad Class and Graduate Student Association that their funding would also aid the other libraries on campus?

JT: The Library consist of Harriet Irving, Science and Forestry, Engineering and the Education Resource Centre. Any funding would support the system. While any specific proposal could be more directed at one of the locations, in the long run, the entire system would be enhanced.

The possibility that funding from a group will benefit everyone all the time, is slim. The library does not have a problem of putting together a list of potential projects. For instance, our equip-

ment budget has been low. We have to start thinking about replacing and improving our micrographic reader printers, etc. I'm not sure what amount a Grad Class donation would be, but you could look at replacing some equipment in one location one year and then schedule equipment requirements for future years. It would be an enormous strain to replace everything at one time.

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When the Social Club approached us, we provided a list of half a dozen potential requirements. One example is funding reference sources that we don't have. The possibility of adding reference sources that would support every faculty program is greater.

One project that covers the whole campus would be to replace dissertation abstracts on CD, which would make the search for dissertations a one step process rather than going through individual years which takes up a full range in the reference department. That essentially supports grad students, but from many fields.

A group supporting the entire campus has to be very careful in terms of choosing and trying to meeting everybody's needs. The chance of doing that on a regular basis are very small. But over a period of time meeting everybody's needs could be achieved. When taking a project that, for example, benefits the science library, that reduces the funding pressure on the library as a whole, thus it would be possible to perhaps undertake another project which we would not have been able to undertake. So, in the long run it might benefit several people.

AC: Considering additional funding and use of the library, what steps have you taken to make not only the university community aware of the library's resources and needs, but also the general community as well? Where do you see future improvements to your public relations program? Do you see the idea of having some type of forum for feedback from students and professors crucial to this process?

JT: This question is very difficult to answer at this time. No specific plans have been initiated to develop a fund raising campaign. In looking to the future, attention will have to be given to the area of fund development, and communication as part of that process.

It is an area where a lot of effort is going to have to go in over the next few years. We are going to have a chance to do some celebrating in the new future. We will be adding our millionth volume this spring, so hopefully in starting some of those type of projects we can develop a friends groups at some point down the road.

Essentially, we provide extra mural cards to

Fredericton community residents which is about five dollars for three years' use. We have about three thousand extra mural card holders and they receive a two week loan period and that works fairly well. We've always viewed the library as being a resource of the province and the community. We are not trying to do things the public library does, but if people have other requirements they certainly are free to make use of the collection.

AC: One issue which has come up recently is the amount of library graffiti which can be found on library carrels. What steps have you and your staff taken in order to prevent such destruction? If someone is caught by one of your staff or campus security, what is the fine and is it actually enforced? Apparently, much of the graffiti is aimed at individuals and some people have stated that they find it difficult to study in such an atmosphere. In addition, much of the graffiti is blatantly racist. Do you feel this is a threat to the library as a place for study?

JT: The graffiti is serious and it has come to a new low. We normally clean the carrels usually during the summer period. One carrel that was drawn to our attention just recently was simply taken out of the library. Following that, there was a meeting with security, the chair of the sexual harassment advisory committee and the assistant dean of students to decide what can be done. We have placed little cards in each carrel specifying that individuals who are caught defacing the property will be charged. People caught will be direct by security to the student disciplinary committee to be penalized. The penalty is restitution, a fine up to twelve percent of a student's tuition, restrictions of social privileges and could involve a recommendation from the president for suspension or dismissal. I think it is necessary that we take it seriously. When it is reported that people are starting to get worried about coming to the library, it has gone well beyond the bounds.

It is unfortunate when this type of thing happens, but that is why we have put on additional security patrols. We are pleased that we have not had any reports of attacks or aggressive behavior in the library, but certainly this type of graffiti is aggressive and offensive. We are trying to strike a balance between the library as being

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useable but also safe and that people feel secure. People ought to feel secure in the library.

AC: How do you rate the library in today's academic environment? What direction should

the library be going in the next five years?

JT: The UNB library is a medium sized research library. We will celebrate the addition of the one millionth print volume in a few weeks. Our micro collection is 1.8 million equivalent volumes. A substantial collection and a substantial investment made by the province over the years. It is essential that we continue to build upon this foundation. In addition, the library, through programs such as quick loan, broadens the access to an even greater wealth of information around us.

The library world has undergone fundamental shifts during the past two to three years. This shift has been prompted by the information explosion which was accompanied by unrelenting cost increases. Libraries across North America found they were spending more and acquiring less. It is a losing game to continue to apply the old rules. Therefore, resource sharing arrangements, cooperative collection development, reliance on commercial document delivery services took on new importance and now new publishing options are available.

The number of publications has increased dramatically. North America produces a hundred thousand monographs a year. Now these are not serials, just monographs and worldwide we are now looking at many hundreds of thousands published every year. We can only collect a small percentage of that total. Hopefully, we collect the things that support the teaching programs here and it seems obvious that we are. So if we can collect the material that handles 80 to 85 percent of the immediate requirements we can then start to depend on other libraries or commercial sources to fill in the gap by coming up with agreements like the one with Alberta.

During the next five years, I expect the library to engage in more cooperative ventures with libraries in the region, such ventures could be with other individual libraries as the one with the university of Alberta. I know there will be other agreements, but they will depend on our requirements and finding partners who are like-minded.

The publishing patterns are changing as well. There are a number of electronic journals which are not available in paper form. So we have to start looking at how we provide access for students to these. The working terminals in the libraries ought to be able to access different services - different types of publications which are no longer print in nature. If terminals were available in all the residences, material could be made available as text files and a student could work from his/her room. So I think there are many things which are either possible now and evident to us or possible now but not evident to us and things which will become evident down the road. The library must remain flexible to search for the opportunities which will be coming up. I think there will be a number of changes in the next five years because there is no stability in the publishing market at the moment and technology is certainly not allowing us to catch our breath.

On campus, there are many areas where the library has to actively work to enhance current partnerships, and where current partnerships exists, we must continue to develop them.

The Brunswickan will be running a short survey questionnaire on library usage next week as part of an on-going study of library use amongs UNB students.