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NEW UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN LOOKS AHEAD

Doug McInnes was named University Librarian in June 1982. A few weeks ago the Editor of the Library staff newsletter asked him about the Library's present situation and future prospects. Here are some excerpts from his response.

I believe that UBC has a good library system, though because of the number of its branches and the complexity of the Main Library building it is also a costly system to operate. Clearly, the Library's real strength lies in its rich collections and in the expertise of its staff. In comparison with many research libraries, the UBC Library is quite young; it has nevertheless developed collections of international importance, thanks to the priority given over the years to maintaining collections funding even in difficult times and to the dedication of those faculty and library staff members who have worked to build collections of lasting importance. In particular, the breadth and depth of our serial and microform collections are remarkable, even among very large libraries.

We also have in good measure the other ingredient essential to a strong research library: people with the knowledge, skills and desire to make the Library a vital part of the University's teaching and research programs. The UBC Library has a tradition of good service. This is often difficult to maintain in a large system, with the pressures of heavy use and shortages of funds, not to mention the inherent tendency of large organizations to become impersonal in their relations with those they serve. In my view, the truly memorable characteristic of this library comes from the extra effort that so many staff members make to satisfy individual library users.

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The most serious weaknesses of the present library are its inadequate physical plant and the lack of funding to proceed with a more systematic transition to the use of new technology. In many parts of the Library, the shortage of space for collections and patrons is already critical. Equally frustrating is our inability to reorganize the space we do have so that collections and services can be used more efficiently.

The Library's small systems staff has developed outstanding computer support systems for housekeeping and records control. At this point, however, I can think of nothing that would improve services more than the capital funding and other resources needed to take the next step: to bring the multiplicity of records together in a unified system, allowing patrons and staff to determine quickly and easily what we have, where it is, and if necessary, to request it for use.

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Although we spend at least half of our collections budget on serial publications each year and have a strong serials collection, we still get many complaints about the unavailability of current periodicals. We must give some priority to finding ways of improving access to current periodical literature. Reductions in the number of duplicate subscriptions, together with increased emphasis on journal articles in many undergraduate courses, have made this perennial problem more acute. No simple answer will suffice: to make any real improvement we will have to review loan policies, procedures for handling and binding serials, physical arrangements for housing current issues, and staff requirements to keep issues in good order on the shelves.

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As soon as possible, Library space requirements must be reviewed, updating figures used as the basis for the 1980 proposal for a new central library building. It would make good sense in the present financial climate to examine alternative plans that could offer more immediate relief to the Library's most critical space problems.

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At this time no one can predict the effect that economic constraints may have on future library services. In 1982/83 the Library was obliged to make substantial staff reductions, the most noticeable effect of which was the closure of the Ecology Library as a branch and the elimination of the Reading Rooms Division. Both steps represented real reductions in service, affecting people in the Library and in many faculty departments. On the positive side, collections funding was maintained in 1982/83 at a higher level than anticipated. The Library also opened two new branch libraries (the Health Sciences Library at St. Paul's Hospital and the Hamber Library in the Children's/Grace/Shaughnessy hospital complex), a health sciences networking service, and assumed responsibility for the Film Library and the Centre for Human Settlements A/V Library.

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I hope that the Library can renew and strengthen its contact with faculty departments. Close relationships and good communication will be essential if the Library is to serve its community adequately in the next few years.

MORE CHANGES

Since the appointment of Doug McInnes as University Librarian there have been several changes in the allocation of duties among the five other people who form the Library administration.

The Associate Librarian, Bill Bell, retired at the end of June 1982, and because of retrenchment, the Library has not been able to fill his position. His responsibilities are being shared by two other members of the administration. Bob MacDonald, in addition to his duties as Assistant Librarian for Technical Processing and Systems, oversees the planning and management of the Library's budget. Erik de Bruijn, the Assistant Librarian for Administrative Services, is responsible for the Library's personnel services and labour relations for professional as well as for non-professional staff.

Responsibility for the Library's public services has been divided between two people. Heather Keate, formerly the Deputy Biomedical Librarian, will supervise circulation, reference, and information services in the branch libraries, excepting Mathematics, Sedgewick, and the Wilson Recordings Collection. Bill Watson retains these responsibilities for the central libraries (Main and Sedgewick), for Mathematics and Wilson, and for the time being Crane, the Curriculum Laboratory, and Asian Studies.

Tony Jeffreys coordinates the development of the Library's collections and manages the expenditure and allocation of the collections budget.

The position of Assistant Librarian for Physical Planning and Development, formerly held by Bill Watson, will not be filled for the time being.

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