Reading room problems in the Harvard College Library, 1942-1947

Citation

Permanent link
http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42673657

Terms of Use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA

Share Your Story
The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story.

Accessibility
Reading Room Problems of the Harvard College Library, 1942-1947

The servicing of required and collateral reading for students in Harvard College has undergone many changes during the war and post-war years, changes necessitated by the effort to make every possible adjustment to varying conditions. The year 1942-43 marked the closing of the freshman libraries in the Harvard Union and in Boylston Hall which had serviced the required reading for the large freshman survey courses in history, government, and economics, together with the tutorial collections in these fields. The two-term summer session was inaugurated, enabling some students to complete their college course before being drafted. Student enrollment dropped from 3500 in the fall to 1900 in May; but, because of the two-term summer session and the transfer of Boylston Hall and Harvard Union library activities to Widener, the total use of the Widener Reading Room compared favorably with that of other years.

With the fall of 1943 came the three-term year and the V-12 and A.S.T. programs. The men in the V-12 were an integral part of the College, using the same library facilities as the civilian students. Boylston Hall was opened as a study hall for the men in the A.S.T. program, since they had separate classes and special book reserves.

The summer term of 1944 marked the low point of Widener Reading Room use during the period of accelerated studies. In the following year, with the end of the war, there was a sharp transition from the small wartime accelerated classes to larger groups of students. In November the return of some staff members from service permitted the expansion of curtailed library service, and the Boylston Hall and the Harvard Union libraries were reopened. Then, during the spring term, effects of demobilization were felt, when the enrollment of undergraduates reached 2800. The use of the Widener Reading Room increased one-third over the last pre-war year, providing a basis on which to plan for the expanding student enrollment.

Two major problems in library service became acute with the influx of returning students: books and their shelving, and seating facilities. The purchase of duplicate copies, made possible by additional funds, eased the book situation to a considerable degree, but the Library was harassed by the fact that standard texts were out of print and many books available only in limited quantities. Contrary to its usual policy, the Library purchased textbooks in order to give all students an opportunity to read text assignments. Simultaneously, measures were taken to increase the seating capacity. Twenty chairs were added to the Reading Room; graduate students having stalls were encouraged to use them by being allowed to borrow reserved books for use in the stacks; the Radcliffe students, who had been given the use of the west end of the Reading Room, were restricted again to the
Radcliffe study in Widener, with a supplementary study hall provided in
the basement of the Memorial Chapel
for use between classes. The LowellMemorial Room, open formerly for a
limited number of hours daily, was
staffed during regular library hours;
reserved books in Romance Languages
were transferred to rooms G and H,
insuring greater use of these two
rooms and freeing shelving space in
the Reading Room. The Child Memorial Library was opened during
regular library hours, with an attendant
in charge, and the increased use
of this library by graduate students in
English likewise helped to relieve some
of the pressure on facilities needed for undergraduates. As a further move in
this direction, books reserved for
graduate courses in English Literature,
Classical Philology, Romance Philology, and History were shelved
in rooms N and O on the top floor of
Widener. These rooms served also as
subsidary reading rooms when all the
seats in the main Reading Room were
occupied. In addition to the above
measures, which were put into effect
at the beginning of the fall term 1946-
47, the Library held in reserve plans
for a large study hall in the Harvard
Union.

During the first months of the cur-
rent academic year, facilities were
taxed more heavily than ever before
in the Library's history. Fifty-four
hundred undergraduates constituted
a 54.2 per cent increase over pre-war
enrollment figures, yet the circulation
of books for use in the Widener Read-
ing Room increased nearly 250 per
cent. This extraordinary rise in cir-
culation may be attributed to several
factors: the necessity of using library
copies of textbooks when purchase was
impossible; the provision by the Li-
library, as far as supply permitted, of
additional copies of books for assigned
reading; and, perhaps most important,
extre effort on the part of men keenly
aware of interrupted studies, shortness
of time, and competition for training
in the professional fields. After the
hour examinations in November the
heaviest pressure was off; the students
had passed the first big hurdle and had
settled into a somewhat more normal
pace of studying. While it was true
that even during the period of heavi-
est pressure Widener had been able
to seat all readers either in the main
Reading Room or in the rooms on the
top floor, it was felt that the crowded
conditions could and should be allevi-
ated. The Library space in the Harvard
Union was not being used to greatest
advantage, since the students preferred
to use the more convenient though
more crowded Boylston Reading
Room. Therefore, to insure greater
use of the Union Library, all the re-
serve books for two survey courses
were transferred from Boylston Hall,
and this move in turn permitted the
transfer of three large courses from
Widener to Boylston. These changes
forced the maximum use of all the
Union facilities and reduced the over-
crowding of Widener. The advan-
tage of having this seating space avail-
able was demonstrated during the fall
term Reading Period, when another
peak was reached and all three libraries
were taxed to capacity.

The situation has been unusually
difficult, and will remain so as long as
books are in short supply and the en-
rollment heavy. In any case, the
present conditions emphasize the need
for a special undergraduate library,
with all required reading and refer-
Harvard’s Importation of Foreign Books since the War

As war spread across the world in the late thirties many libraries in the United States, including Harvard, asked agents abroad to hold for future shipment such books and periodicals as it might be impossible to forward on publication. The sudden shock of Pearl Harbor and subsequent events dislocated arrangements of this kind and left eventual coverage uncertain. Again, when war in Europe ended a bit more quickly than was anticipated, it had been impossible to work out in advance definite plans for reopening trade relations and restoring channels of acquisition.

Two years have now elapsed since fighting ended on the Continent. The first of those years was spent in formulating and getting into shape the machinery through which, during the past twelve months, a great quantity of European publications have been brought to American libraries. The situation except for Germany is now closer to its normal pre-war status. New methods have been developed in the acquisition of European imprints, and one project in particular did much to prevent high prices and offset competitive confusion. It is the purpose of this note to outline the channels through which material has been received at Harvard, and to give a brief indication of its extent and variety.

The earliest shipments from what had been Nazi-dominated Europe reached Cambridge after the war was received by the Harvard College Library during January 1946. These consisted of monographs for which orders had been placed previous to 1941, and of material published during the war years for which agents abroad had standing orders in the Library’s name. Sweden, Holland, and Denmark were the countries of origin for these initial shipments. In March similar consignments came through from France, and, in the months immediately following, Italy, Belgium, Greece, and other countries were able to clear shipments. Booksellers’ lists were received from Austria late in 1946 and it is expected that shipments from that country may reach Cambridge at any time. The situation with Germany is still bound up with official restrictions, but it is hoped that by the time this note appears Germany will be open for trade relations.

Some months before the earliest shipments arrived from Europe a project was organized called the Library of Congress Cooperative Acquisition Mission for Recent Foreign Publications, to which the Harvard
List of Contributors

KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College

AGNES MONGAN, Keeper of Drawings in the William Hayes Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University

CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives; Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society

HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL, Deputy Treasurer of the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

REGINALD FITZ, Lecturer on the History of Medicine, University Marshal, and Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University

ROBERT W. LOVETT, Assistant in the Harvard University Archives

WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the Harvard College Library in charge of the Houghton Library

ADRIANA R. SALEM, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard College Library

EVA FLEISCHNER, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts

LOUISE B. GRAVES, Boston, Massachusetts

PHILIP HOVER, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library

PHILIP J. McNIFF, Superintendent of the Reading Room in the Harvard College Library

FRANK N. JONES, Administrative Assistant in the Harvard College Library