

Report on the History of the Library Committee
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The University Library Committee was formed by President Jesse in the mid-1890s as a result of the 1892 Academic Hall fire that destroyed most of the library's collections. The university president continued to appoint members of the library committee as recently as 1985; current members are appointed by Faculty Council. For most of its history, the committee has been a vital link between the library and the university administration, advising the president (now known as the chancellor) and the provost on budget allocations for the library and on academic priorities.

Although the earliest library committee papers preserved in the University Archives date from 1897, the committee was probably operating by 1895, when Professor Switzler attempted an inventory of books that survived the fire. At this time gifts were coming in from other libraries around the country to restock the library. Some of these are still in the Ellis collection and have bookplates from the donor institutions. The committee was probably involved in co-ordinating this effort. The first clear evidence of the committee's activity comes from a library committee report to the Board of Curators, dated 8/26/1897, which recommends that the university hire a "trained librarian" and create a card catalog to settle the persistent problem of identifying which books remained and to manage acquisitions. Jesse endorsed the recommendation on 9/9/97 and specified two new positions, Head Librarian (at a \$2,000 annual salary) and an assistant (at \$1,000).

The first professionally trained librarian, James Gerould, was finally appointed in 1900. J. C. Jones, the chair of the library committee at this time, reported in 1906 that the committee had instituted a call-slip system, saving the librarians a great deal of work. Inventorying and cataloguing books continued to be a concern and the committee recommended two new staff appointments. The library committee was disbanded for a time in the early twentieth century.

Most of the books that survived the 1892 fire survived because professors had them checked out in their offices—but ironically, the library committee was revived in 1934 to deal with the problem of faculty book hoarding. Henry Severance, University Librarian, "insist[ed] that faculty office libraries be eliminated" (De Weese 19). The president agreed to appoint a faculty committee to act as a liaison between the library and the faculty, and library committee records are continuous from that period. Many of the University Librarian's (later Director of Libraries') annual reports to the committee are preserved in University Archives. From the 1930s to the 1980s these reports consistently lament shortages of staff, space, and funding.

The library committee was particularly active in the 1980s, to judge from the extensive minutes preserved in the archives. The committee at this time was still operating in the role defined for it by the university's collected regulations in 1960 (see Exhibit A). In 1979-80 the committee was engaged in an astonishing range of activities, including interviewing candidates for the provost position (see Exhibit B). The committee met eighteen times during that academic year. In 1983 the new chair of the committee, Professor Herbert Tillema, announced a change in the committee's role,

which would “no longer [be] involved in establishing the book fund allocation budget; the committee now deals primarily with major policies.” The Director of Libraries, however, continued to present his annual budget requests to the committee.

The University Library Committee has become smaller and less active in the last two decades for a variety of reasons having to do with the changing professional roles of both librarians and faculty, and with the changing nature of media and technology. Sadly, however, this change also suggests that the library is no longer as central to the agenda of the university administration as it traditionally has been. The long overdue completion of Ellis Library’s south extension is another sign of this comparative neglect. It is unlikely that the current committee will resume most of the activities formerly conducted by the committee. Our role in advising the current director, Jim Cogswell, is all the more crucial in the current context, and in the future we might draw some inspiration for our agenda from the committee’s long history.

One historic concern that we would do well to revive, in this writer’s opinion, is the concern with staff numbers and compensation, in which we continue to lag behind the large majority of peer institutions. (For a comparison, see the Ass’n of Research Libraries web site, www.arl.org, under Resources.) That particular University of Missouri Libraries tradition is not one worth continuing.

Sources

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from University Library Committee papers preserved in the University Archives. See further <http://muarchives.missouri.edu/libraryex2.html>. I have also quoted *The History of the Library, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1928-1946*, by June De Weese (1980).