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CONDITIONS FOR ENTRANCE
TO THE SERVICE
OF AMERICAN LIBRARIES

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*Entrance to American College, University,
and Government Libraries*

Any consideration of the conditions for entrance to the service of college, university and government libraries in America must take notice of the fact that in this country owing to the existence of numerous library schools with satisfactory courses of study, a constant body of prospective assistants is available. These people have been carefully trained for different phases of library work, and in at least three of the schools, a second year of training is given which has particularly in mind the work of college, university and reference libraries. That this supply of trained workers is as important a factor in the question as has been suggested above may be seen from the fact that librarians of 15 of the important colleges and universities in the country are graduates of a single library school and that naturally they will, whenever possible, use similarly trained people upon the staff of their libraries.

College and university libraries

Entrance to the service of college and university libraries in the United States is more informal and simpler than that in any other class of libraries in the country. No examination is required, preliminary apprenticeship or voluntary service in the library is seldom insisted upon, and the librarian is freer to make his own selection uninfluenced by other considerations, such as the interest of the members of a board of trustees, the importunity of the undesirable influence of personal friends or the necessity to please or conciliate any faction. Indeed college librarians often have power to appoint assistants themselves without the consent of the library committee. (A. L. A. Bulletin 1 : 262).

Because of this freedom, the principal positions in such libraries usually are filled with those who have been specially trained in library work or who have had an equivalent experience in a library of this type. In filling these places the librarian usually looks to the library schools for suitable recommendations, to the staff of some other college library or to the possibility of promotion from his own staff.

The subordinate places are filled by undergraduate students who are used in nearly all college libraries either for full or part time. During their residence at college, they learn gradually a great deal about the work of the library and often remain in its service after graduation, and in many cases eventually take responsible and important positions upon its staff, or are recommended to and employed by other libraries. Because of the greater freedom in the appointment to the staff of college and university libraries, it happens that these libraries find it easier to secure and oftenest employ librarians or assistants with better general and professional education and experience than public libraries.

These are the actual conditions in this country. They are upon the whole very satisfactory and more satisfactory probably than the conditions which govern the admission to the staff of public libraries. The only improvement which would command general assent is the ability to employ more

specialists, or men and women with more general education, a better professional training and an ampler library experience. The college and university libraries are in most cases poorer than public libraries, and they are able to get satisfactory assistants chiefly because hours are usually easier, vacations longer, and the tenure more secure. If these libraries could have ampler income and employ in all grades of the service better qualified assistants, probably no different method of appointment or promotion would be felt to be necessary or desirable.

Government libraries

Practically all of the libraries in the various government departments and offices, with the sole and very important exception of the Library of Congress, are under the U. S. Civil Service. Examinations are so arranged as to require and give due weight to previous library experience, a considerable knowledge of bibliography, cataloguing and indexing. The only formal educational requirements which form part of the examination are usually a knowledge of modern languages, though for the better positions and especially when men are wanted, usually only college graduates are admitted to the examinations. The requirements for general education are usually varied in different examinations to be appropriate to the position. Thus, for an examination for librarian in the Bureau of Standards, applicants must have been graduated from a technical school or have taken a scientific course in college, and their library experience must have been with scientific books.

Women are admitted to the examinations for all minor positions (\$ 600 to \$ 900 per annum) and often to those paying even more than this. In the minor positions and frequently in the better places, women are preferred. Promotions are made without the formality of another examination, satisfactory service being the chief consideration. Women are frequently promoted to positions where if a new examination were to be given, a man would probably be preferred.

Appointments to the staff of the Library of Congress are entirely in the hands of the librarian. Though it is outside the operation of the U. S. Civil Service Commission yet the requirements both as to general and professional education and library experience are quite equal to those insisted upon in the Civil Service examinations. The efficiency of the staff of the Library of Congress after ten years of appointments made in this manner is a striking testimony to the results which may be secured by leaving all appointments in thoroughly competent hands quite independent of any Civil Service oversight.

Another class of government libraries are the state libraries, about fifty in number, usually one in each state. In some states there are additional libraries connected with the courts. In most of the states the librarians of these libraries and the members of their staffs are appointed for personal or political reasons and with no consideration of training, experience or special fitness for the place. Some times librarians have been appointed in this way who have made efficient officers, have assembled a competent and carefully selected staff, and once convinced of the necessity for securing assistants who are specially trained, they have become the most strenuous opponents of any attempts to force the appointment of inefficient people. The evil of political appointment is becoming less and less as healthier standards are insisted upon, and as library work becomes more and more a specialized vocation. In a few states, New York especially, all positions in these libraries are under Civil Service, and examinations very like those given by the U. S. Civil Service Commission are the conditions for entrance to the better positions. Minor positions are filled through simple examinations in spelling, penmanship, composition and arithmetic.
