
Students and Libraries: In Their Own Words

John Lubans, Compiler

The following are selections taken from the Suggestion/Answer Book in the lobby of Perkins Library. Since late 1982 this loose-leaf notebook has recorded over 3,900 suggestions, questions, complaints, observations, compliments, pleas, and demands. An anonymous author responds to each. The author's identity is kept secret for several reasons not the least of which is the apparent appeal to students for some mystery and the resulting informality in the process of making a suggestion and receiving an answer. A student publication had this to say:

"A thick volume rests on the desk in the front lobby of Perkins. This magical three-ring binder contains the words of the resident Library Oracle, an anonymous figure capable of answering any question or suggestion posed by the mind of the tortured Duke student.

But enough talk *about* this peculiar medium for librarians and users, here is a sampling from its pages for your entertainment and, perhaps, more.

Suggestion: Why is it that the book or bound periodical one *needs most of all* for any paper is **always** missing? It's odd, because usually, the rest of the *entire* collection (in the case of bound periodicals) is there laughing at you. Every book I've never needed is here, easily found, yet when I desperately need a particular book, **IT IS NEVER AROUND. WHY?** Pardon my rambling discourse.

Answer: A phenomenon shared by more than a few. Sometimes a well grazed topic may contribute to depleted resources. We'll share your insights with the staff.

John Lubans is Associate University Librarian, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University in Durham, N.C.

Suggestion: Why must we freeze in the computer room? My hand is numb.

Answer: What happened to your other hand? Are the rumors about the polar bears true? Your plea will go to Physical Plant for their attention.

Suggestion: Why with such a pretentious (sic) reputation, is Duke in actuality (sic) an intellectual backwater, and, at least among the students, a cultural vacuum?

Answer: I beg to differ; just this morning I overheard a group of students discussing the Aristotelian qualities in "General Hospital" and "As the World Turns."

Suggestion: People using my carrel spilled orange soda on the floor; then the circulation people leave nasty notes on my desk, & my feet stick to the floor. Where are the food-sniffing Dobermans when you need them?

Answer: Heinz and Schlupferl are at summer camp being de-stressed in time for the fall semester. Fifi, our substitute patroller, yips and yaps a lot but doesn't have the same effect as the combative combo. Soon.

Suggestion: Do the "close door" buttons in elevators really work or are they a psychological pacifying device?

Answer: Pacifiers were thought to be unhygienic; the buttons won out.

Suggestion: **FREE THE BOUND PERIODICALS**

Answer: Under glasnost major improvements in the condition of these dissidents of the subbasement gulag have occurred. Familial visits are not permitted and on occasion, certain terms being met, escorted visits to other parts of the university are allowed.

Suggestion: Duke has to be the last major library system that manually checks out books. Is this to keep with the Gothic architecture?

Answer: Next year, we hope, will see the last of manual checkout.

Suggestion: What happens if you have a major overdue book fine, and you are a senior and emigrate to Cuba? Will you follow me to the ends of the earth? Will this affect my credit rating?

Answer: Your name and description goes to "Fat Albert" (the Navy blimp in the Florida Keys) with a "find and penalize designation" for its Bolt from the Blue program.

Suggestion: That damn bell that rings at 11:45 pm scares the hell out of me. It startles me, which is fine because it wakes me up, but it's useless because we've only got 15 min. left to study. How about ringing that damn thing around nine-ish so it'll keep us going for another few hours. Then at 11:45, you could have some "cheerful chimes" to indicate that the end of hell has come.

Answer: Sunday thru Wednesday that bell now signals an extra two hours of suffering available in the "old" building, until 2 a.m.

Suggestion: Please put a photocopier in an inconspicuous location. They are all in plain sight, and it is very difficult to photocopy our boobs without embarrassment.

Answer: Wonderful! You're the first person not to complain about malfunctioning photocopiers! Maybe they work depending on the subject matter being copied. You do know that Public Safety gets a video impression via the photocopier lens?

Suggestion: I've heard that the book-theft machine could, in some circumstances, scramble an egg. Is this true? If so, tell us so we can bring them in with us and eat breakfast.

Answer: This is true if you carry them thru the gates in a flaming pan, beating them vigorously with a wisk. Don't add salt until confiscation at the Circulation Desk.

Suggestion: I think everyone should be required to study naked in Perkins at least once during their undergrad or grad experience while here.

Answer: Perhaps this could be incorporated in the curriculum under experiential education. Sort of like an Outward Bound - type solo in Perkins. Forage for food and drink (no problem there); endure the agony of cold, black plastic seats; and become one with the environment - cope with Perkins extremes of heat and cold!

Suggestion: What's the procedure for tipping the circulation staff? They do a damn good job.

Answer: Slip a tenner inside a book you're returning. Leave it outside the Administrative Office on the second floor. We'll be sure to pass on the book for you.

Suggestion: On which day did the lord create Info-trac? Why didn't he create it sooner? When will he invent robots to do all our research for us? Why not sooner?

Answer: For freshmen of yesteryear it wasn't soon enough. Consider yourself lucky. Some let the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Reader's Digest* do all their research (and thinking). Resist by browsing through strange parts of the library and looking at unheard of magazines.

And then, this fan mail makes all we do seem a bit more valuable, especially on days when the mundane tends to prevail:

"The library is fantastic. I love it. Upon the outset of writing an 88 page term paper for freshman Undergraduate Writing Course, I found all 20 sources within 9.8 seconds. How do you do it? I love this library."

"No suggestions. I like this place. I like everything about this place. Well, almost everything. But even the things I don't like, I sort of like. You know? I mean, some things are kind of endearing in their very unlikability. Like this book, for instance. Like you know what I mean?"

S  E  A  S  O  N