

# Community Use of Tax-Supported Academic Libraries in North Carolina: Is Unlimited Access a Right?

by Barbara Best-Nichols

**I**n 1979, I was employed as Head Librarian at a major company located in the Research Triangle Park (RTP). This company's library and staff had access to the facilities of the research libraries in the area, two of which are supported by the North Carolina General Assembly and one of which is a private institution. The Research Triangle Foundation had negotiated with these libraries to provide free access to their collections and services by RTP companies' employees.

In 1989, I was employed as Library Supervisor at a company located adjacent to Research Triangle Park in Wake County. This company was in the process of developing a research library collection. Thus, its resources were not complete enough to provide all the materials necessary for the research being conducted. During the 1977-81 and 1981-85 terms of Governor Jim Hunt, corporate recruitment for the state was at an all-time high. Part of the recruitment strategy emphasized the availability of area university resources that included laboratory, faculty, and library resources. Before relocating, the company in question held conversations with the chancellor of a local tax-supported university who promised free use of the facilities when the relocation was complete. Efforts to capitalize on the use of library facilities of this tax-supported university were unsuccessful. In order for the research staff to borrow materials for home or office use without going through the interlibrary loan process, a contribution to the Corporate Patrons Program of the Friends was required. An annual contribution of \$600 or a life membership of \$5,000 "allows all employees of the company to enjoy the benefits of membership — including library borrowing privileges — without paying the \$25 individual rate."<sup>1</sup>

The preceding paragraphs illustrate the lack of consistent service to the research community's use of public academic libraries. What, then, is the responsibility of the tax-supported academic library to the community user? In 1967, E. J. Josey paraphrased a similar question raised by Eric Moon in 1966, which was, "could not residents of the community argue that they had a right of free access to college and university libraries receiving generous support from state and federal funds to which their taxes have contributed?"<sup>2</sup> Although this issue has been debated throughout the years, it is not presently resolved.

This issue is germane to both the individual and commercial residents. Because business establishments are paying higher tax rates than individuals and contribute greatly to the overall

economy of the state, are their requests for services any more legitimate than those of the individual requester's? This is not to say that the individual resident is any less important or has a need that is any less valid. In fact, the taxpayer sees a significant portion of income being withheld for state and federal taxes. These tax withholdings are given back to the community in many forms, including entitlement programs, block grants, educational programs, library funding, and many other programs and services too numerous to name. "Academic libraries are accepting federal assistance, not only for building construction but also for books, materials, and equipment. The question of whether or not to deny a taxpayer the right to use his tax dollar in a given academic library may no longer be moot."<sup>3</sup> Area meetings in preparation for the Governor's and White House Conferences have presented the opportunity to address this issue on a state and national level.

In the fall of 1990, a series of regional Governor's Conferences on Library and Information Services was held. These conferences were a prelude to the second White House Conference on Library and Information Sciences. Several resolutions addressing the use of all libraries by community members were made at these regional conferences. One resolution specifically addressed the use of university libraries by members of the community with specific reference to professionals in businesses, companies, and corporations.

The following are actual resolutions made at the various regional Governor's Conferences on Library and Information Services throughout the state in the fall of 1990.

1. "Resolved: That the General Assembly mandate all state-supported universities to extend full library services to include borrowing privileges to professionals of businesses, companies, and corporations performing research or manufacturing within a 35-mile radius of said universities. That this extension of services be specifically applicable to those businesses, companies, or corporations recruited by the North Carolina Department of Commerce or other municipal Departments of Commerce who indicated that the area was conducive to their operations because of the available resources from the area universities, the premise upon which Research Triangle Park was developed. Further, that this extension of services not be predicated on membership within organized

"Friends" or other local support groups. Be it further resolved, that the discriminatory practice of some state-supported universities of allowing full service to include borrowing privileges to professionals of business occupants of Research Triangle Park to be disallowed or discontinued."<sup>4</sup>

2. "That library service to business be developed and promoted in all libraries to meet the economic development needs of the community served."<sup>5</sup>
3. "The North Carolina General Assembly assures that library resources of all libraries in the state are listed in computer format so that the library resources of the state are known and thus available to all citizens."<sup>6</sup>

These resolutions were a public appeal for libraries of all types to provide information to all people.

Resolution One was an attempt to persuade tax-supported academic institutions to allow community users access to their collections, with borrowing privileges, specific requests being made for business, company, and corporate professionals. Further, that utilization of library services should be free of fees, such as Friends memberships, minimal contributions, or other financial payments. The premise is that as commercial taxpayers, businesses have already paid sufficient monies for the availability of various state-supported services, to include library use.

On many campuses where services to community users are being contemplated, the question is being raised as to "which community users to serve."<sup>7</sup> Not only is the business community growing, but so are the artistic and related cultural communities. In addition, the health and legal service communities are also expanding rapidly. They generate "unassociated or extramural college library borrowers who are serious researchers who no longer pursue formal study; they are writers, artists, doctors, lawyers, scientists, and poets who live within the proximity of the college library. These persons need library materials for their professional work, their research, or for speech purposes."<sup>8</sup>

Former President Bush on April 18, 1991, released *America 2000: An Education Strategy*. This initiative was "to move every community in America toward the national education goals adopted by the president and the governors in 1990."<sup>9</sup> In this plan, it was the aim of the former president and governors to ensure that students, parents, business, community leaders, and others become involved in learning. "The president challenged adult Americans to 'go back to school' and to make this a 'Nation of Students.' The president urged every American to continue learning throughout his or her life, using the myriad formal and informal means available to gain further knowledge and skills."<sup>10</sup>

While the America 2000 plan focused on a 'Nation of Students,' made up of all segments of occupations, many of the nation's colleges and universities have been "extending services to members of the clergy and teachers."<sup>11</sup> These individuals are "extended privileges because of the responsibility of their positions, feelings of trust and confidence and also because much of the materials required weren't housed in public libraries."<sup>12</sup>

In today's society, teachers and clergy are not the only individuals who have awesome responsibilities. Elected officials, private citizens, and others require access to information to perform in a judicious manner. Werner Cohn, a retired sociology professor paraphrased a quote by Justice Robert Jackson by stating, "without access to adequate information, citizens cannot exercise their civic functions; without reasonably comprehensive library facilities, there is no adequate access to information.... But citizen access to the library has dangerously eroded in recent years because the private university library has with-

drawn from public service."<sup>13</sup>

Though the above quote is about private university libraries, it is certainly relevant to many public university libraries. "The relationships between the library and its external users have been reexamined under present day conditions of high costs and restrictive budgets for library operations."<sup>14</sup> Lack of adequate resources has caused many public university libraries to reduce hours, staff, and services. This withdrawal of services and staff, and this reduction of hours have created problems for its primary users, the faculty and students. Thus, it is also necessary to withdraw these services to the external user. "Funding is not usually provided to research libraries to serve the general community users."<sup>15</sup>

Resolution Two supports and further amplifies the position that library service to business should be developed and promoted in "all" libraries to meet the economic needs of the community served. The word "all" implies the inclusion of academic libraries.

## Literature Review

In reviewing the literature much emphasis was placed on the use of academic libraries by high school students. At least three of the articles suggested that academic libraries could prove to be very effective recruitment tools. One in particular indicated that "the large number of community residents who visit the library, including teachers, businessmen, and high school students are all potential sources of new students for academic institutions. This is particularly true if the visitor's exposure to the institution through the library creates a favorable impression. A positive library experience can reinforce positive opinion about the entire institution."<sup>16</sup> There also was considerable information on the use of academic libraries by business and professionals within the community.

The literature search cited several articles on the use of academic libraries as they relate to online public catalog training for the public and other end-user public access.

## Research Design

Because of the lack of previous research on the topic, a survey to provide additional information about the community and its use of tax-supported academic libraries was compiled.

Data was obtained from eleven libraries. These libraries, all within the state of North Carolina and part of the University of North Carolina System, receive support from the North Carolina General Assembly. These eleven libraries represent all geographical areas of the state. The libraries also include historically black colleges and universities and a Native American university. Two of the libraries are at the same university; however, one is a professional school library.

The instrument, "Survey: Library Use by Non-Students and Faculty," was faxed to all sixteen state-supported colleges and universities. This instrument was designed to determine policies of these institutions regarding use of their libraries by the community. Further, the instrument was designed to determine if these universities actually included community use in their mission statements. It also queried the relationship of these libraries to the business community and high school students. Additionally, the instrument was designed to determine whether or not the local Chamber of Commerce cited the availability of university library resources in recruiting industry to local areas. This information was requested from the libraries and not the local chambers of commerce.

## Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this investigation were:



1. Tax-supported academic libraries provide services to community users who are not university or college students and faculty.
2. Tax-supported academic libraries do not provide free borrowing privileges to residential and business community users.

### Survey Results

Narrative form is used to report the survey results. No attempts were made to massage, synthesize, or summarize these results. The researcher felt that having the actual responses would prove of greater value than providing composite responses.

Eleven (65 percent) of the seventeen instruments were returned. The survey group was all tax-supported academic libraries. Of these eleven responses, one institution indicated that it responded only to official statistical surveys from the Association of Research Libraries; thus, the total number of respondents completing the survey questions was ten (59 percent).

The survey questions and respondent answers are in narrative form. This gives the reader the full essence of the survey.

Respondents were asked to send copies of their mission statements. Nine (90 percent) returned mission statements and three (30 percent) returned circulation policies.

**Question 1:** Does your mission statement allow you to serve the community outside of the campus environment?  
Yes. No.  
Explain and attach a copy of your mission statement.

Library A. "Yes. ... In addition to the services provided to our primary clientele, the Library offers selected services to the larger community of which ... it is a part — alumni, citizens of the local area, and students and faculty of other academic institutions."

Library B. "Yes. ... In addition, ... serves as a secondary resource for non-technical health care information for health care consumers in the local community."

Library C. "Yes. ... The diverse campus and community clientele are aided in their use of information resources, services, and facilities by the Academic Library Services faculty and staff who offer instruction and assistance."

Library D. "Yes. ... Service is extended to ... residents of the larger city-county-regional area who have informational and resource needs which can be met by an academic library."

Library E. "Yes. Permission is granted on a case by case basis if the requester can show demonstrated need."

Library F. "Yes."

Library G. "Yes. ... Fundamental to its mission are excellence in teaching, high quality research, scholarship, and creative expression; and fostering a strong sense of community through curricular and co-curricular programs."

Library H. "Yes. ... Within its allocated resources, the Library also accepts the responsibility for providing various services to citizens and scholars outside the immediate university environment."

Library I. "No."

Library J. "Yes. The statement does not formally address service to the larger community, but there is certainly no prohibition on such service, and service to the larger ... community is permitted, and in some cases, encouraged. For example, the Reference Librarians arrange for high school students to tour the library and work on their research projects while in the library."

**Question 2.** If yes, is this service non-restrictive, that is, do you loan the materials out through normal circulation procedures or is service restricted to in-house use?

Library A. "Non-restrictive."

Library B. "Normal circulation."

Library C. "Non-university patrons may borrow materials from the library. They do not restrict to in-house use of library materials."

Library D. "Normal circulation policies."

Library E. "Yes, the loan period is the same!"

Library F. "Normal circulation policies."

Library G. "Loan agreements are established with area colleges, secondary schools, public library. These arrangements allow those institutions to issue written referral notes requesting that the borrower be allowed to check out materials on a specified subject. The referral note is kept by us. A new note must be brought each time borrower comes to obtain material. These patrons are limited to 6-8 books at a time. The referral institution is responsible for seeing that the borrower returns all books, pays any fines due, or pays for lost material. If borrower does not pay, referral institution reimburses this Library."

Library H. "Normal."

Library I. "Normal circulation procedure."

Library J. "Non-restrictive, but there are some limitations as indicated below."

**Question 3.** If yes to circulation, is the circulation period the same for community users as it is for academic patrons? Explain.

Library A. "Yes; loan period is 3 weeks with 2 renewals. Popular collection (browsing) — 2 weeks with no renewals. (Same loan period as for ... students)."

Library B. "Yes, except for faculty clients who have a one-year check-out period — actually, everything due end of spring semester."

Library C. "Area Resident, 14 days; Borrower's fee \$15.00 individual, \$100.00 corporate. Community College, 14 days; Borrower's fee \$15.00 individual."

Library D. "Three-week loan — same as for students."

Library E. "Same."

Library F. "Non-student users have a one month loan, same as our students. They are subject to same fines & bills charges; recalls and other notification."

Library G. "Same as for undergraduate students. Material on reserve and audio-visual materials are loaned only to ... students, faculty and staff."

Library H. "Same as undergraduates, but 4-book limit."

Library I. "Yes. Three-week circulation period is standard with a three-day grace period — Exceptions: Graduate students/14 day grace. Faculty & staff/1 year grace."

Library J. "This circulation period is 21 days for both university and "city patrons." However, City Patrons must pay a \$10.00 per year fee, they may not borrow books if they owe fines in any amount or have overdue books, and they must be at least 18 years old or be accompanied by parents if less than 18 and registering as a borrower. We are a little more strict with the City Patrons than the students. For example, they may borrow no more than five books at one time, but students may borrow as many as they need."

**Question 4.** Do you believe that the general (local) taxpayer should have access to tax-supported university resources?

Yes. No. Explain either answer.

Library A. "Yes."

Library B. "Yes."

Library C. "Yes. Our primary responsibility is to provide library and information services that support the students, faculty, and staff of ... Once that responsibility can be determined to have been met, then we will attempt to assist members of the community. If there is competition between the two groups for the same resources and/or services the university community always has priority."

Library D. "Yes. I believe that community users are entitled to in-house use of materials for free. Other services may need to be fee-based."

Library E. "Yes. However, outside access to materials owned by small institutions should be restricted."

Library F. "Yes. As per our mission statement we should be a resource to the taxpayers of N. C. Though we do insist on the primacy of our immediate community's scholarly, instructional & research needs." (Mission statement was not included).

Library G. "Yes, but access is for use of materials within the Library, not for loan of materials nor for library services restricted to students, faculty, staff such as ILL, computer database searches, etc."

Library H. "Yes. I believe in open access to information."

Library I. No response.

Library J. "Yes. Prohibition of use for taxpayers would be ethically questionable and perhaps illegal if push came to shove. Generally, use by non-campus people has not been a significant drain on library resources, it is good for library/community relations, and has not created problems of any significance."

**Question 5.** If yes, should the services be fee-based or free? Explain.

Library A. "\$10.00 non-refundable fee for library card for community patrons."

Library B. "Free, provided they are free to primary clientele."

Library C. "If our primary clientele is charged for a service then the general public will be charged at least the same rate and, perhaps, more. In some instances, the general public will be charged because of higher loss rates or the inability to influence them to honor obligations they have made."

Library D. "Fee-based. Universities are funded by FTE student counts. Unless funding formulas are changed to take community service into the formula, some services must be fee-based."

Library E. "A small deposit would weed out the non-serious!"

Library F. "They are and should be fee-based to discourage possible misuse of our resources."

Library G. No response.

Library H. "Fee based. Students pay fees, in addition to their (or their parents') taxes to support the library, so community users should pay at least a cost-recovery fee for being able to check materials out of the library."

Library I. No response.

Library J. "We think a fee for borrowing is reasonable. It

shows the community borrower is genuine about using the resources, and perhaps lessens the chance of someone registering as a borrower, taking books, and never returning them. Any other service — copies, online searches, etc., are based on the same fees students pay. Our fees are cheap compared to many libraries. \$10.00 a year to borrow books, 5 cents per page for copies; some academic libraries charge as much as \$100.00 per year for community borrowing privileges."

**Question 6.** Are you aware if the businesses and industries in your area have their own libraries? Some do. Some don't. What percentage do?

Library A. "I am not aware."

Library B. "Some do."

Library C. "Some do. All of the very largest businesses appear to have libraries of some type. The medium-sized and smaller businesses seem, without exception, to not have libraries."

Library D. "Don't know."

Library E. "Some do." (Percentage) "Don't know percentage."

Library F. "Some do." (Percentage) "Not known to us."

Library G. "Some do." (Percentage) "Do not know."

Library H. "No."

Library I. "Some do." (Percentage) "I have no idea."

Library J. "Some do." (Percentage) "Impossible to say, probably less than 1%."

**Question 7.** Does your local Chamber of Commerce cite the availability of your resources when recruiting industry to your area? Explain.

Library A. "No, but a good idea."

Library B. "I don't know, but I doubt it."

Library C. "The Chamber of Commerce emphasizes the presence of the university as a positive feature that offers a wide variety of collaborative opportunities for businesses considering moving to the area, but there is no specific reference to or emphasis placed on the availability of the university library."

Library D. "Don't know."

Library E. "Don't know."

Library F. "N/A."

Library G. "Don't know. Fairly sure University is cited in recruiting/publicity materials promoting the ...area."

Library H. "Do not know."

Library I. "Yes."

Library J. "No. The University as a whole is one of the notable resources, ... but as so far as industry recruitment, libraries are small change."

**Question 8.** Is the economy of your area affected by the "lack of" or "access to" reference information available to the community and its business leaders? Explain.

Library A. "No."

Library B. "No."

Library C. "There is no way to answer this question with any degree of confidence. There is an assumption that many business and community leaders do not know what they



do not know when it comes to the availability of information resources and support. Whether that lack of understanding has an impact on the local economy is so speculative that it is not worth worrying about."

Library D. "Don't know."

Library E. "Don't know."

Library F. "N/A."

Library G. "Would believe it is."

Library H. "Do not know."

Library I. No response.

Library J. "Again, impossible to say. It would take sophisticated survey work to measure such effects. The local library ... has an excellent business collection and is quite active in providing information to the business community. They even will provide free online searches to businesses."

**Question 9.** Do you or would you like to have a special information sharing relationship with the businesses, government, or industries in your area?

Library A. "Yes. Informal sharing with lawyers and some community businesses..."

Library B. "No."

Library C. "Yes, if the right conditions existed. Given the severely restricted resources available to the university libraries there is little opportunity to develop external relationships. If the university had the resources available to support the campus community adequately then it would be appropriate to explore the development of relations with other major communities in the area."

Library D. "I can't respond unless I know specifics of arrangement. We certainly are not staffed or funded to do a great deal of reference work for non-university users."

Library E. "No. In order to accomplish a feat of this type, additional funding and staffing are needed."

Library F. "We have excellent relations with regional government and business organizations. Some informal, others on an as needed basis. We generally deal with individual members of those organizations per our liberal granting of privileges ..."

Library G. "Yes."

Library H. "Yes. We now do online computer searches for businesses on a cost-recovery basis. Also allow some companies ... to use corporate borrowing cards."

Library I. No response

Library J. "Yes. Such relationships would enhance the depth of resources available to everyone involved. However, our budget is limited, and to provide the extensive resources needed to meet wide-ranging questions and research needs, we would need more funding for materials and staff."

**Question 10.** How recently has your mission statement been updated.?

Library A. "1991-1992."

Library B. No response.

Library C. "The mission statement was last updated in 1990 and is reviewed every year."

Library D. "2/87."

Library E. "Don't know."

Library F. "N/A."

Library G. "2/21/91."

Library H. "Fall, 1992."

Library I. "Updated in January 1992 to cover period July '92 through June '94."

Library J. "1989, during the last SACS review."

**Question 11.** Under what conditions do you make your services available to school students and school faculty? (non-academic).

Library A. "No cards are issued to public [school] students; they may use material within the library. Public school teachers may obtain a community borrower's card."

Library B. "Inform those in the service community of the resources and services which are available to them."

Library C. "We do not loan to any person under the age of eighteen."

Library D. "Anyone may use materials in house. Library cards may be purchased for \$12.00/yr. by N.C. residents over 18. We give library tours to school groups on request. We have reciprocal borrowing agreements with local community and private colleges. We do not do interlibrary loan or database searching for non-university users."

Library E. "Policy being reevaluated."

Library F. "N/A."

Library G. "Lending agreements in place with secondary schools, colleges, community colleges in the area."

Library H. "See attached policy." Policy states that "Adult North Carolina residents, (over 18 and out of high school) may purchase a borrower's card, valid for six months, for \$5.00. The fee is waived for citizens over 65 years of age."

Library I. "Tours of library by appointment only, and school librarian must be with class or group. Tour does not include introduction to online catalog, indexes or CD-ROM. School librarian and teacher provide any instruction."

Library J. "School faculty have to pay the \$10.00 annual fee to borrow books; students have to be accompanied by a parent and pay \$10.00 to register for annual borrowing privileges. Anyone can use materials within the library itself, but some form of ID is required for borrowing current periodicals and some reference materials. Usually, students just want to work in the library, and don't really need to borrow the materials."

## Conclusion

On the basis of the survey responses, it is apparent that there exists within the public university libraries of this state a vast difference in approaches and philosophies to serving users external to the college or university environment.

The response indicates that some libraries do provide free borrowing privileges; however, others charge a variety of fees. For residential borrowers, fees range from a low of \$5.00 to a high of \$15.00 per year. Some libraries extend services to high school students and even assist with projects, while others allow high school students only in the company of their parents, teachers, or school librarians.

Business borrowers of public academic libraries pay annual fees averaging approximately \$100.00 (average of reported responses). At least one public academic library reported that it provides online searches for business on a cost-recovery basis. It also allows some businesses to use corporate borrowing cards.

This sampling (small based on the number of libraries included in the survey) gives evidence to the hypothesis that some state-supported academic institutions are providing some services to community users who are not university or college students and faculty. This sampling also gives evidence that some state-supported academic libraries are not providing free borrowing privileges to residential and business users. This is apparent from their mission statements and circulation policies.

It is evident that as the general economy declines and the need for information increases, there must exist among libraries the ability to extend services beyond their originally intended customers. Academic libraries are in the best position to extend services. Academic libraries, business, industry, and corporations must create alliances to share their resources; these alliances will allow each to have access to vital informational resources without stretching and snapping budgets in an attempt to acquire everything.

In so doing, taxpayers will be able to access information wherever they can find it, especially from publicly supported institutions.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Personal correspondence dated August 13, 1990 from local tax-supported university library director. (Prefer not to disclose name since all other libraries cited in study were not named. Available to editor only.)

<sup>2</sup> E. J. Josey, "Community Use of Academic Libraries: A Symposium," *College and Research Libraries* (May 1967): 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Best-Nichols, Resolution (North Carolina: Second Regional Governor's Conference, 1990). This resolution was rewritten and disseminated to all participants at the regional

Governor's Conferences from the State Library (September 12, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Gormley, Resolution (North Carolina: First Regional Governor's Conference, 1990). This resolution was rewritten and disseminated to all participants at the regional Governor's Conferences from the State Library (September 12, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Leland M. Park, Resolution (North Carolina: First Regional Governor's Conference, 1990). This resolution was rewritten and disseminated to all participants at the regional Governor's Conferences from the State Library (September 12, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Blanche Judd and Barbara Scheele, "Community Use of Public Academic Libraries in New York State: A SUNY/CUNY Survey," *The Bookmark* (Winter 1984): 127.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Josey, "Community Use of Academic Libraries," *Library Trends* (July 1969): 71.

<sup>9</sup> Lamar Alexander, "A Message from the Secretary," *America 2000: An Educational Strategy Sourcebook* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1991), [i].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Josey, 198.

<sup>12</sup> Richard C. Quick, "Community Use — Dealers Choice" in "Community Use of Academic Libraries: A Symposium." *College & Research Libraries* (May 1967). 187.

<sup>13</sup> Werner Cohn, "Private Stacks, Public Funding," *American Libraries* 24 (February 1993): 184.

<sup>14</sup> Judd., 127.

<sup>15</sup> Lucretia McCulley, "Public Use of Academic Libraries in Virginia." *Virginia Librarian*. (April-June 1988): 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ronelle K. H. Thompson and Glenda T. Rhodes, "Recruitment: A Role for the Academic Library," *College and Research Library News* (October 1986): 575.

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