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Report on Rockefeller University Library, 1972

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TO: President Frederick Seitz
FROM: Jay K. Lucker
RE: Report on Rockefeller University Library

This report contains my recommendations based on three visits to Rockefeller University: on November 15, 1971, December 7, 1971, and January 5, 1972 as well as on our informal discussion on January 17. In accordance with your original instructions to me, my recommendations cover two major subjects: the physical facilities for the Library, present and future, and the general operations of the Library. In making these recommendations I have drawn heavily upon the report of the Rockefeller University Library Committee dated April 8, 1971 as well as upon my interviews with Dr. Sunderlin, Dr. Choppan, Mrs. Mirsky and yourself.

Physical Facilities

It is clear to me that Rockefeller University has three options with regard to its Library:

1. Decide to keep the Library in Welch Hall for the foreseeable future and renovate the entire building
2. Begin immediately to plan an entirely new Library without making any changes in the present building
3. Decide to build a new Library within the next three to four years, begin fund-raising and planning toward this end, and undertake a minimal amount of renovation in Welch Hall with the idea that this will enable the Library to function at a fairly efficient level in the interim.

The first option would be, I believe, a totally unrealistic solution to the problem. Welch Hall, particularly the areas presently not occupied by the Library, was not designed with the needs of book storage, reading facilities, and staff functions in mind. It would take a tremendous expenditure of money to provide even a rudimentary operating library. The complicated system of intermediate floors, the lack of a general air-conditioning system, and problems of lighting are almost overwhelming.

The second option is not feasible because the Library cannot operate under present conditions for much longer without seriously affecting service to faculty, students and staff. Even if the money were available today, which I understand is not the case, it would be at least three years before the building was ready for occupancy given that a suitable location could be found. The latter, I would think, is contingent in part upon decisions concerning air rights and the location of the new animal facility.

I would, therefore, recommend that you proceed with plans to renovate part of the space presently available which was formerly occupied by the dining room and related functions. In general, my suggestions follow those of the Library Committee.

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1. Add to the Library only the larger rooms on the lower floors: the main dining room, the common room, the small dining room, and the ladies dining room. Almost all the other space is either too small, poorly located, or in a condition that would require an inordinate amount of work.
2. Subject to further discussion, I would envision the new space being used as follows:
 - A. Main dining room -- for the unbound journals
 - B. Common room -- for the display of each day's receipt of journals and as a reading room with lounge-type furniture
 - C. Small dining room -- for abstracting and indexing services and related reference tools
 - D. Ladies dining room -- for bound journals
3. If the above were to occur, additional changes would be made in the present Library, among them using the present large reading room for the book collection and reserve materials.
4. Use the stage in the main dining room for the Xerox machine.
5. I would not recommend air conditioning any of the new space with the exception of the common room and the small dining room. If this were done, those people using the Library during the summer would have adequate reading space under fairly comfortable conditions. Window air conditioning units should certainly be sufficient for this purpose.

There are, of course, major problems involved even with the minimum type of renovation I have suggested. Of particular concern to me is the matter of lighting. I also agree with the Library Committee that something should be done about the elevator but I would think we need the advice of mechanical engineers before making any decision.

With the above in mind, I would recommend that Rockefeller University commission an experienced library architect to undertake studies of how Welch Hall might be modified so as to accommodate the Library for a period of three to four years. Based on my experience at Princeton I would like to suggest that the firm of Kilham, Beder and Chu, 101 Fifth Avenue, New York, be considered. I have worked with Robert Beder, senior partner, for about four years and I have found that he has an understanding of library operations seldom to be found among other architects. KBC has done a number of renovation projects for us in addition to having designed Firestone Library and our new addition. If you wish, I would be pleased to continue as a consultant, working with the architects, the library staff, and the University administration.