The Friends of Business
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A Secure Resource
By Beatrice Sichel, Professor Emerita & Former Head, Circulation/Reserves

[In recent issues of Gatherings, departments of the University Libraries have been spotlighted to show the complex and often unrecognized operations that make a multi-million dollar enterprise possible, as pioneer librarian Melvil Dewey once said, "The right book to the right person at the right time." The Circulation/Reserves department is an operation that everyone takes for granted, and no one understands—except the faculty and staff who keep it running.]

When a visitor enters the atrium of Waldo Library, he or she may notice the handsome, curved wood and granite counter on the left. This area, not always seen until leaving the building, is, because of proximity to the doors, the "Keeper of the Gate." Such a simple phrase hardly encompasses the myriad services and a massive record-managing function assigned to the Circulation/Reserves Department. The following commentary does not, by any means, touch on all of the roles of this department, but here are five key responsibilities.

Census of Users
As almost everyone expects from a unit identified first as Circulation, the department maintains a computer file of over 40,000 patron records dating back to 1991 when the "new" Waldo was opened. University employees and students are issued ID cards upon their arrival; this card is their "library card." The retirees of the University remain on the system for life and students retain privileges for one semester after graduation. But, in addition to the primary patrons, the Libraries serves a large number of guest borrowers. Among them are:

- students and staff of Kalamazoo College through a reciprocal borrowing agreement;
- anyone attending special seminars or programs at WMU;
- middle school students from the Academically Talented Youth Program (ATYP) of southwest Michigan;
- members of the Southwest Michigan Library Cooperative, which is made up of public, elementary and secondary school, and community college libraries, receive "courtesy passes" to use the Libraries;
- any community resident who has permanent residence status within a radius of 50 miles of Kalamazoo and is over 18 years of age can be a guest borrower. Even the 50-mile radius is waived when the patron registers at a library that belongs to the State-sponsored Michicard program that provides access to over 250 Michigan libraries.

Patron Accountability
The thousands of users who borrow books and other materials from the Libraries provide an historical and current information record that has multiple uses. In addition to the patron's name and address, each in-house circulation record displays the patron category (e.g., student, staff, type of guest borrower); the patron ID number; a list of the books or items currently checked out; and any assessed library fines or fees. This information is protected under the State of Michigan's Confidentiality Act, and the department does not reveal the titles of items checked out to anyone other than the user. However, the current WestCat catalog provides a user record for one's own personal account. On the main screen, "Your Library Account" will give each user a record of what he or she has checked out.

As a result of their key responsibility to be "keepers" of the collections, the Circulation/Reserves staff has the least pleasant, and time-consuming, duty to assess fines and fees. The Patron Services Area, found on the north side of the library, left and just past the atrium area, manages this large enterprise. As books become overdue, a statement of charges is sent to the user as a reminder to return the material. When 45 days have passed from the due date, it is the Libraries' policy to declare the book as lost, and a lost book charge is assessed to the user. Thousands of such notices are generated each academic semester as the different due dates (undergraduates, graduates, faculty and staff, guest users) are identified through the computerized circulation system. The sheer amount of paperwork relating to library fines that is required in a university of this size means that a significant portion of the staff's time is allocated to "keeping" the inventory under control, that is, knowing where the resources are and getting them back into use. Finally, a year after a book has been declared lost, the Acquisitions Department is notified that the title needs to be reviewed for replacement.

Not yet mentioned but what outsiders would see as the most obvious aspect of Patron Accountability is the fact that the staff of the Circulation/Reserves department physically handles every item that is checked out from and back in to Waldo Library. Basic accountability for the Libraries' resources demands that the inventory be tracked, and that the location on the shelf, in circulation, in a spe-

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cial collection, being repaired, etc.) of a title purchased, cataloged, and shelved in the collections is known. When an item is circulated, its unique machine-readable code and the patron’s ID are linked in the system. A due date is established and noted. Each physical item is also then desensitized so that the electronic alarms are not set off when leaving the building. When a book is returned, the process is reversed at each step. In between the check out and the return, the database record of circulated items can be used for a number of management and inventory reports.

First and Last Contact
The professional staff of the Circulation/Reserves department found in Waldo Library has the very special responsibility to open and close the entire building. A member of the Circulation staff must arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled time of opening, and take responsibility for turning on all of the lights, unlocking department doors, and, finally, opening the three main doors. Closing is a reverse of the process, but due to the size of the building, a full “shut down” requires at least 30 minutes including a floor by floor walk-through to check for anyone who has not exited as requested. During the same period, at least three library-wide announcements are made, any last minute check outs of books and other materials have to be processed, reluctant patrons are shooed through the doors, lights turned off, and the doors locked. Waldo Library may then sleep in peace disturbed only, on occasion, by a diligent member of the Physical Plant staff.

Security Check Required
Our current society and law demand that the resources of a public institution not be stolen or damaged. Already noted is the major responsibility of the Circulation/Reserves department to notify users of overdue and lost books. Probably even more demanding is monitoring the surveillance system. Everyone who enters or leaves Waldo Library, as well as the branch collections, must pass through a set of electronic detection gates or checkpoint. All resources found in the Libraries’ collections are electronically tagged to set off an alarm if the item has not been checked out at the Circulation Desk. When the alarm is set off, the patron exiting (or entering) is called back to the Circulation Desk and his or her backpack or briefcase checked—and the material then circulated properly. On occasion, as with airport detectors, strange items can set off the alarms. The staff has found videocassettes, spoons, and other innocent objects that have set off the piercing “beep beep,” and, once in a while, an embarrassed patron who is caught returning books that were never properly checked out!

Stealing or mutilating books is a serious offense. Signs indicating this fact are posted widely throughout the Libraries. Damaged or mutilated library material is considered to be evidence of intent to steal. Each such situation requires that the incident be reported to the Department of Public Safety, and the Libraries may follow up with legal action.

Reserve Resources
A common function of most academic libraries is that of providing a “closed” reserve that has special protection for valuable items—valuable for quite different reasons. There are three such “reserve” collections in Waldo Library; each is located behind the Circulation/Reserves desk, and is serviced only by the Circulation/Reserves staff.

The largest and most demanding component of the reserve collections is found in Course Reserves. This set of materials consists of thousands of items, either books or photocopied material in file folders, that are placed on reserve by instructors for the use of their students. The instructors consider these materials to be supplementary to the class textbook or in need of special monitoring. Since both courses and instructors vary each semester, there is constant change in the composition and record of the course reserves collection. If the course is offered again, the bibliographies must be reviewed by the instructors to determine whether titles are still needed, new titles should be added, or if selected material should be returned to the stacks or to the instructor. If the course is not to be taught in the next session, then all titles need to be returned to the instructor or the stacks. Since the reserve collections are marked with special designation and included in a search index in WestCat, changes in the location (e.g., Reserves, General Stacks, etc) must be made at the end or beginning of each academic session. Needless to say, these manually inputted changes take inordinate amounts of time.

However, a partial resolution of this ongoing problem is expected with a new electronic reserve system that should become operational in the Libraries in 2002. An electronic reserve collection will provide the full-text of selected reserve material online, 24 hours a day. Certain material, in accord with copyright law, can also be reprinted. This system will not negate the need to make appropriate changes in the reserve records for a given course, but it will make more material accessible from remote locations without a trip to the Libraries.

A second part of the reserve collections is the Best Seller collection. About 100 titles, consisting of books from the New York Times Best Seller List, plus the latest works by popular authors, are kept on reserve. The books have a two week loan period and are transferred to the general stacks after six months.

The third set of titles on reserve is items designated as necessary for permanent reserve. Two characteristics, enhanced security and a need for a limited loan period, determine what is placed in this grouping. Among the items found there are art books, books on controversial subjects, technology and computer science (especially software), and study guides for admissions tests, e.g., the GRE. In recent years, books published with accompanying disks or CD-ROMs have also been shelved with this group of resources. These titles generally circulate for seven days only.

The Circulation/Reserves department in Waldo Library is surely the “Keeper of the Gate,” the “Keeper of the Collection,” and “Keeper of the Reserves.” From literally opening and closing of the doors of the building through maintenance of security to monitoring the four million items found in the University Libraries, the staff and students of this department are committed to making the University Libraries’ collections accessible and accountable to all of its users.

Circulation/Reserves (left to right): Beatrice Sichel, Karen Maas, Carrie Jordan, Perry Scrivener, and Jean Douglas.