

## Branch Libraries – Specialized Libraries

Gabriela MORĂRESCU

*“Lucian Blaga” Central University Library  
Branch Library of Biology-Geology-Geography  
Department of Zoology*

The *branch libraries*, libraries that serve the specialized departments of the Babeş-Bolyai University, and are located in the buildings administrated by these departments, have a special place in the organizational structure of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library Cluj-Napoca, as in the case of other central university libraries in the country as well.

Each branch library holds the documentary and information basis needed for education and research, and serves the students, faculty and academics associated with these faculties as users. It also offers its services to all users registered at the “L. Blaga” Central University Library.

The staff of the branch libraries comprises university or college graduates in the faculty’s field of specialization (with a certificate in library science), university or college graduates in library science, and high-school graduates (who also have a certificate in library science).

The public benefits of the branch library’s services daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and on Saturdays in the morning, except for certain small branches that have a single-shift working program. During exam sessions the opening hours of the working days are applied for Saturdays and Sundays as well.

In order to offer useful products and collections, and efficient services, the *branch librarian* has to know in detail the faculty (or department) it belongs to, and the needs of the users. The librarian also has to know the organizational structure of the departments, the subjects of study, faculty and staff members (it is most important to know the people in charge, and the administrators of the buildings that house the branch library), the organization of the students in the years of study (study lines, divisions, number of students), the disciplines they are taught, and the fields or topics of research investigated by the collectivity of researchers associated with these departments. Thus the *branch librarian* must always have an open, amiable attitude, and the ability to permanently work in a tense, even stressed atmosphere.

The activities in a branch library are diversified, some with a permanent, others with a sequential character, thus a branch librarian's job is quite complex. *Public relations* is one of the most important activities (lending and accessing publications, current and in-depth bibliographical information, registration of new readers, continuous formation and education of the users), followed by the specific activity of *library techniques* (evaluation/cataloguing/classification of books and periodicals received as direct donations, the traditional and in some cases automated processing of the publications, organization and administration of library tools, database editing upon request). As for sequential activities, it includes the re-organization and periodic verification of library collections, and the activities of the continuous professional formation of the library staff (introductory and proficiency courses in computerized processing of the publications, the use of new computer software).

To ensure an efficient and optimal activity in a branch library, it must be well organized in matters of location of the publications, of search tools at the users' disposal (traditional and/or computerized), of communication with both the Central Library and with the faculty members of the departments it belongs to. Last but not least, there should be efficient collaboration among the members of the library staff, *teamwork* being the secret of such collaboration.

Although the branch libraries of the "L. Blaga" Central University Library function according to the same principles, they differ in terms of location (old buildings – newly arranged locations), organization of the rooms needed (with or without a separate place to hand out the publications), number of users and their needs (study at the library, home loan, creation of information products on different subjects – databases). Thus, the examples given will refer directly to the Zoology branch library (part of the Biology-Geology-Geography Library, besides other five library locations).

The present paper intends to compare a branch library and a specialized library, from several points of view, in order to confirm the fact that the perfect *branch librarian* is the combination of two professions: an expert in information science, and an expert of a certain field of research.

Before the comparison however, a specialized library has to be described in short, based on the paper by Julie Hallmark of the Faculty of Library and Information Science of the University of Austin, Texas, entitled *Specialized Libraries*, presented at the conference *Contemporary*

*Tendencies in Library and Information Science*, held in Cluj-Napoca in May 1996.<sup>1</sup>

The specialized library is patronized by a certain organization or institution that collects and organizes documents specialized in narrow fields and offers detailed services to a specialized group of users in order to support the tasks and objectives of the patronizing institution, supplying efficient and fast services.

The staff of specialized libraries is formed by librarians specialized in information science, who sometimes find themselves in the situation of collaborating with research groups specialized in certain fields, capable to work in stressful situations, and flexible too in the tasks of their job.

Specialized libraries offer a wide range of services, from the transmission of documents, to the evaluation, analysis and processing of information.

On an international level, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) was founded in 1909, now with over 15,000 members (280 in Europe), in geographically divided branches and several special divisions, according to the field of interest (e.g. Publicity and Marketing, Biology, Geography and Mapping, Education, Engineering, Journalism, Pharmacology, etc.).

### **Library collections**

Specialized libraries have smaller collections, acquired according to their usefulness for their users, the emphasis being on current information: books and periodicals, technical reports, governmental publications, standards, references, catalogues, financial reports, laboratory data, annual reports, etc. Many titles are acquired in CD-ROM format or other multi-media products. As the materials are acquired in an economic way, the specialized libraries must permanently prove their usefulness.

A branch library has larger collections, containing collections of books and periodicals acquired through the "L. Blaga" Central University Library or by direct donations from individuals or institutions. Unfortunately, these acquisitions are getting fewer each year, due to the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Tendințe contemporane în biblioteconomie și știința informării: lucrările conferinței* (Contemporary Tendencies in Library and Information Science: The Conference Papers), Cluj-Napoca 23-26 May 1996 and Iași 30 May – 2 June 1996. Iași: SHAKTI, 1996.

lack of funds, and this puts the branch librarian in a frustrating position any time he or she has to explain this to the users (the faculty and researchers need more up-to-date information from books published abroad, students want more copies of the bibliographic material given in the various classes).

The Zoology branch library had 46,586 volumes on 31 December 2002 (32890 books and 11998 serial publications), organized in several collections, some with low circulation (old books and periodicals), some with a high circulation (current books and periodicals, university manuals).

There is a difference here between the two types of libraries compared, namely that a branch library does not have a budget of its own for acquisitions, a fact which, to a certain extent, favors specialized libraries.

### **Organization and access to collections**

Generally, access to collections in a specialized library is made through a classification scheme, cataloguing, and indexing. Sometimes a detailed terminology is required, due to the specific profile of activity. The librarian has an important role in controlling the registered information on an institutional level, in maintaining, using, and the arrangement of the documents, and he/she may even become responsible for the archive of the patron institution.

A branch library provides access to its collections by means of various information tools, traditional and computerized: the online catalogue of the “L. Blaga” Central University Library (accessible on a computer placed in the reading room, using the integrated library system ALEPH 500), databases (using the ProCite library software – very user- and librarian-friendly), a traditional catalogue-system with files (alphabetical, systematic – according to the U.D.C. classification, thematic, and for serial publications geographical).

### **Services for the users**

As for the services offered by a specialized library, these can be grouped as follows: **reference services** (quick answers, by consulting printed, electronic or other reference sources), **detailed information** (services that need a longer time, searching databases), **document transmission** (using a commercial service of document transmission),

**updating with last-minute information** (providing products according to the requirements of the users: annotations, abstracts, partial or full texts), **circulation** (each specialized library chooses between sending material to interested users or keeping it for reading in the institution), **forming of the users** (the librarian teaches the users to use the information products), **specialized services** (information analysis and evaluation, localization of the information, graphic representation, proposals for future activity, translations).

In the case of a branch library the services for the users are very similar to the ones listed above. Thus, there are **reference services** (questions that can be answered by means of a dictionary or a telephone conversation, short bibliographic information, like the popular name of a species of animals or plants, etc.), **detailed information services** (in depth information that requires the use of other printed information products – e.g. the Collective catalogue of foreign books in Romanian libraries –, tables of systematic classification, of databases, or publications from the collections of the library), **updating** with the publications that newly entered the library (lists, completion of traditional and computerized catalogues with the description of new publications), **circulation** of publications (a service of major importance, having in mind the specificity of a university library to contribute to the process of learning: serving the publications for local reading or for home loan), **forming and education of readers** to be able to use the information products of the library, to respect the conditions of use and return of the publications loaned (great number of students – insufficient copies of certain manuals), specialized services (creation of new information products, on the request of the users or due to technical conditions existing at the branch libraries).

As for the last service mentioned, the Zoology library required a personal database (in ProCite), due to the deficient connection to the Internet (by the University network), and thus the impossibility to consult the online catalogue (ALEPH). There is a database for the serial publications of the current and old collections, one for the books that arrived since 1992 (and which is being completed with the description of all the books from the current collection), databases containing the scholarly activity of the faculty and researchers from the Faculty of Biology and Geology, Department of Biology, databases created on the request of the members of the faculty (a Bibliography of herpetology indexes of periodicals in the field).

## **Preparation of library staff**

The library staff in any library has the task of teaching the users how to use the available products of information, traditional or computerized. There are certain abilities needed therefore, such as: computer usage, and acquaintance with different computer software, searching the Internet and various online databases, knowledge of cataloguing, indexing, and classification techniques, of library legislation, operative rules of the given library, and, last but not least, abilities in working with people (kindness, understanding, patience, resistance to stress).

Librarians from specialized libraries use the Internet for e-mail, newsletters, discussion groups (in order to help themselves in solving difficult requests and to update their knowledge of new resources and services), or to find different free information.

For the preparation of branch librarians it is important to participate in further education courses organized on a periodic basis by the Central University Library or other libraries in the city or in the country, but also to be personally involved with a view to continuous self-education. The Internet is becoming more important in our case as well, for e-mail, discussion groups on different topics, or for different categories of staff; yet, it should be made conscious that questions can be answered only if they are addressed to someone. So, electronic discussion groups should really form a way for dialogue, not only for finding new information.

## **Satisfaction of library staff**

The librarians from specialized libraries enjoy a high degree of autonomy in choosing the automated system they use, maintaining relations with providers and vendors, in the ways of cataloguing and indexing the material, or in establishing the working hours. They work for a long time with the same users, and this fact leads to friendly relations that may be satisfactory for their work, may repay their efforts and they may feel that they contribute to the activity of the patron institution.

Unlike the staff in specialized libraries, the branch librarian does not have the same degree of autonomy, as he/she has no decisive, only consulting role in the acquisition of publications, in choosing the automated system, in ways of cataloguing/indexing, in establishing the

working hours. As for the organization of the working space, it depends on the decisions made on the level of the faculties' Dean's Offices, at this stage being highly important to maintain good relations with the faculty, but also with the administrator of the building (which may put a librarian in more or less delicate situations). Autonomy is enjoyed in the ways of organization of the collections and the information products, according to the needs of specific users. However, they do not lack professional satisfaction, when students use with confidence the information products at their disposal, and are not reluctant to use the reading room, when faculty members trust the branch librarian to accomplish certain special bibliographical works, or simply when the users leave satisfied from the library.

The branch library, just as any specialized library, has a special role in satisfying the users' needs of information, in forming them as future professionals in various fields.

In the context of the development of information technology and the growing needs of the users, a better equipping of branch libraries is necessary in order to be able to offer the requested information on magnetic or paper support (photocopying), as well as being given a larger budget for book acquisitions.