The University Archivist and the Thesis Problem

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ON the first page of the Library of Congress *Information Bulletin* of January 7, 1952 (vol. 11, no. 2) there appeared a note on the publication of dissertations. This note revealed that a committee of the Association of Research Libraries had been studying the peculiar problems involved in the publication and distribution of doctoral dissertations, and also referred to an article in the *ACLS* [American Council of Learned Societies] *Newsletter* (vol. 2, no. 2, November 1951) by Henry M. Silver. Concerning this article, the note said that Mr. Silver

> . . . analyzes some of the issues with which the ARL committee wrestled, explains the thinking behind some of the committee's conclusions, and advances several supplementary recommendations. He points out that aside from their intrinsic value, dissertations offer an excellent case study for an important current issue of scholarship: the efficiency of microtechnics as a means of publishing original scholarly writings and thereby making them available at least for essential use.

A university archivist might well have been dozing complacently through this intelligence. But the phrase "microtechnics as a means of publishing" stirs another level of consciousness. Publication by microfilm, microcard, or microprint could very well be agreed upon as a general practice; here is something we university archivists have also been thinking about, especially since University Microfilms has proved it feasible. Mr. Silver's article becomes "must" reading for any university archivist who has in his charge the theses and dissertations[1] of his institution. Minutes of the Association of Research Libraries are not published and are regarded as confidential by the 43 member institutions. The writer of this paper, already in a rather advanced schizoid condition by virtue of being both a librarian and an archivist, has had an opportunity to read the minutes of the two meetings of the ARL (37th meeting, July,

[1] At the University of California, Los Angeles, a "dissertation" is submitted in the case of a doctoral degree; the paper prepared by a master's degree candidate is called a "thesis."

1951; and 38th meeting, January, 1952) at which the publication of dissertations was discussed. Now he proposes to outline his observations on the same subject based upon his experience as archivist at UCLA.[2] He accepted this writing assignment before he had read the ARL discussions or Mr. Silver's report. What we have here is the UCLA archivist's story told with a conscious effort to avoid specific reference to the ARL deliberations.

Custody of theses and dissertations by the university library at UCLA antedated the establishment of an official archives for the campus. By custom, if not by precise definition, these documents have always been regarded as official documents of the university in that their form is prescribed by the graduate council and their formal deposit in the office of the dean of the graduate division is specified as a partial requirement for the degree. After entries are made upon a student's record to the effect that he has fulfilled all requirements for a higher degree, his thesis or dissertation is sent by the dean of the graduate division to the university librarian (since 1949, to the university archivist). It could be argued that after a thesis goes to the library and is bound like any other book it ceases to be an official record, having passed out of official custody, and that the properly annotated student record is the only official document in evidence of the university's act of conferring a degree. This theory has not been advanced at UCLA; the university librarian is also an official of the university and by implication at least has been an archivist in a limited sense ever since the first thesis was placed in his custody for safekeeping. It is obvious, too, that the thesis was not sent to the librarian merely for safekeeping, official reference, and evidence; the intent was that the librarian should do everything in his power to disseminate the new knowledge contained in the thesis, but at the same time not lose the document. This was a substitute for printed publication, which had become too expensive for the university and for the candidate in most cases. The archivist-librarian had the beginnings of a split personality. As Dr. Jekyll he made the thesis freely available to anyone who asked for it, even entrusting it to the mails for interlibrary loan; as Mr. Hyde he looked suspiciously upon his clientele, which included a few biblioklepts. Disaster was averted by the ruling that required the candidate to submit two copies, the original or ribbon

[2] University of California, Los Angeles. The University of California has a single president and board of regents but consists of eight campuses; UCLA is the second campus in size; its chief local administrative officer is now a chancellor but was formerly a provost.

copy as the archival copy and the first carbon copy as the lending copy.

In 1948 the UCLA librarian charged his newly created department of special collections with responsibility for the archival copies of theses and dissertations. The department already had charge of the official set of the university press publications (printed on rag paper for preservation), a collection of material on the history of the university, the inactive files of the office of the librarian, and a scattering of other records that could be considered official. In February of 1949 the late Provost Clarence A. Dykstra, recognizing the value of the depository which the library had begun, designated the archives section of library's department of special collections as the official university archives for the Los Angeles campus of the University of California. The position of university archivist was provided, at the request of the university librarian, in the 1950-51 library budget.

The archivist, when appointed, became a member of the library staff, his office and function having germinated from the quasiarchival nature of the library as depository for theses and dissertations. He assumed office with series A (theses) and B (dissertations) of the graduate division record group already organized for him. From this beginning the expansion of the archives has proceeded until it now includes a number of official records series, a collection of records that have been rescued from unofficial custody, copies of faculty publications deposited as a record of research and evidence for the use of faculty promotions committees, and the official copies of university publications. The papers of distinguished faculty members and material pertinent to the history of the university have been aggressively collected but are segregated from "official" records. The archivist has served as chairman of a special committee to survey essential university records and make recommendations concerning microfilming; he has also been designated chief of protective services to head the section of the disaster preparedness plan charged with the task of providing security for the university's records against damage during disaster. Only the lack of adequate housing has prevented a more rapid development of the new archival program.

The situation at UCLA is this — although a complete program of records management and archives administration has not yet been attained, in a matter of three and a half years a sound groundwork has been laid, which appears to have the support of the entire university community. In a university an archivist will not get far

without the confidence of the administrative officers (including the university librarian), the faculty, and the student body. This last element of the university community is included deliberately, not merely out of habit. It happens to be true that a university can no more exist without both students and faculty than it can without administrative officers and a place to function; it happens to be true also that the most valuable property of a university is not its physical plant but its records. If some magic or disaster removed a university from the face of the earth, a *new* university could be built; if by some further miracle only the records of the registrar were saved, the *same* university could be rebuilt. The latter case would indeed be a miracle because universities protect their buildings more carefully than their records. The work of the archivist assumes even more importance than that of the janitorial and custodial force and probably will never be so expensive. The first job of a new university archivist should be to gain the confidence and then the active support of the administrative officers, the teaching and research faculty, and the students. Without this confidence, even an administrative order from the president or chancellor may not suffice to accomplish a thorough initial survey of existing records, the step which we have come to realize must come first if a successful archival administration is to follow.

At UCLA the archivist established his rapport with the rest of the university, which in turn enabled him to proceed with his program, through the handling of the record group which he inherited from the librarian — that is, the official files of theses and dissertations. Here was a record of graduate research in which the dean of the graduate division, the university librarian, the faculty, and the graduate students themselves all had a considerable interest. The theses introduced the archivist to the campus and enabled him in turn to introduce the university archives to administrative officers, faculty members, and students. Continuous concern with the theses has led the archivist to make proposals almost identical to those recommended by the ARL committee mentioned at the beginning of this paper. A brief review of the situation as it has developed at UCLA may be of some interest to other university archivists who will be concerned with the microfilm publication of theses and dissertations.

The first thing the new archivist discovered was something that the librarian had known for a long time, that theses and dissertations are consulted and are frequently requested by other institutions on interlibrary loan. The practice at UCLA was to make li-

brary use of the archival (original or ribbon) copy when the second copy (first carbon) was not available for one of three reasons, that it had been lost, or was out on interlibrary loan, or was in use by another person. In a few cases, both copies had disappeared. Neither was it a coincidence that use of the archival copies was heaviest for a relatively few titles; obviously in these instances the supply of copies was not adequate to the demand — the dissertations were on subjects of sufficient interest or importance to have been published. The problem was more critical when only the archival copy existed, for the archivist withheld permission to send the unique copy out of his custody through the mails on loan and he did not like to see it heavily consulted because even a bound typescript cannot survive indefinitely under conditions of library use. The problem was solved partially by making microfilm copies of each thesis that existed in only one copy; multiple microfilm copies were made for heavily used theses even if both the original and first carbon had survived; and by good fortune the missing theses were replaced in microfilm by tracking down authors and borrowing their copies for filming. In this last case a paper photographic copy was made and bound to complete the file. The solution was not entirely satisfactory, but it helped. The archivist learned that he had some manuscripts which really should be published. Should he call this fact to the attention of the University of California Press? He also brought into sharp focus, at an early stage of his career, the important role of microfilming in archival administration. The library, which was already thoroughly microfilm conscious, accepted the microcopy substitutes almost automatically and was considerably relieved no longer to have to refuse interlibrary loan on any thesis or dissertation.

The next thing that the archivist began to notice about his thesis file brought him into working relationships with a much broader circle; in fact, it led him out of the library in which he dwelt, to deal with the university's administration, with the faculty, and with the graduate students. And before long the more active participation of the archivist in the university's work was to result in requests to deposit official records, in his being consulted from time to time on records protection, and finally in his appointment as chairman of a committee to survey the essential records of the campus. The little thing that set all of this in motion was the archivist's discovery that some (really only a few) of the theses did not meet even minimum standards for permanent records. Poor quality paper, especially that wonderful stuff which is so easy to erase that it can al-

most be done with a finger tip, staples, glue, and transparent cellulose tape had crept in. There were also occasional errors in pagination, irregular margins, and illustrative material prepared without regard for handling or binding. Quite aside from the likelihood of their deterioration, some of these documents as physical objects would reflect no credit upon the university that had approved them; the interlibrary borrower might even lose confidence in the subject matter on the basis of indifference as to format. This situation was called to the attention of the office of the dean of the graduate division, southern section, the office to which candidates submit their theses and which issues, in mimeographed form, *Instructions for the Preparation and Submission of Masters' and Doctors' Theses*. The graduate division was very much concerned and indicated that it would appreciate suggestions from the archivist. The suggestions were made and incorporated in the revised *Instructions* which were issued in November 1950. It was obvious that every possible difficulty could not be foreseen in the brief instructions to candidates; so a special provision was made to ensure the enforcement of standards in such a way that the candidate would be spared uncertainty and the archivist would find the trouble before rather than after the degree had been conferred. The following statement was included as the second item of preliminary approval in the revised *Instructions*:

> The University Archivist (room 120, University Library) will check the physical format of each thesis before it is accepted by the Graduate Division; *and it will be the responsibility of the candidate to secure from the University Archivist a memorandum of approval to submit with the thesis to the Graduate Division.* Candidates are urged to consult the Archivist on matters of physical format before the work is typed or otherwise prepared in final form.

Since the revised *Instructions* were issued, the office of the archivist has been a busy place. The countless interviews with candidates have been time consuming, but the time has been well used in the university's interest. The graduate division has been well satisfied with improved results; graduate students have greatly appreciated an opportunity to obtain advice on matters which formerly worried them up to the last minute. A great many faculty members have expressed satisfaction with the new system, which has relieved them of advising on physical format and thus has enabled them to devote their attention exclusively to guidance as to content, presentation, and the bibliographical apparatus of thesis preparation. Only one faculty protest was heard by the archivist. It came from the late Professor Louis Knott Koontz, who was as widely known

for his kindly concern for his students as for his interest in microfilm as an adjunct of research. He felt that the new requirement of rag paper put an unnecessary financial burden on the candidate, since a microfilm copy should be made as the official archival record. The comment of Professor Koontz was certainly pertinent to thesis requirements, for the university archivist had already had it pressed to his attention along with other problems of which he became conscious as a result of his new experience of dealing with records at the creation level. The problems of the thesis, he soon learned, are complicated by the fact that they touch the overlapping interests of university officials who are charged with implementing university policy, the faculty members who direct the research that results in a collection of theses, the graduate students who are the authors of the theses, the scholars and students who need to consult the theses, the librarians who are asked to locate and borrow or lend this elusive corpus, and the custodian of the actual papers, who is either the university archivist or librarian or some other person acting in the capacity of archivist.

Since in addition to teaching and preserving recorded knowledge a university is dedicated to adding new knowledge (through research by faculty and students) and to disseminating this new knowledge (through teaching and through publication), university administrators and faculty members for the most part are concerned about the situation that now exists. Rising publishing costs and increased output in the form of masters' and doctoral theses have practically put an end to conventional publication of even the doctoral dissertations. Some will assert that a natural law has been in operation, saving us from the multiplication of copies of things that are really not needed except in very few copies. It is, however, quite possible that, if the writing of a thesis or dissertation becomes only a practice exercise resulting in a deposited copy and perhaps a printed abstract, the quality of the work may decline and candidates may become lax in their use of material which is the copyright or literary property of others. The threat of critical scrutiny is lost. A person is very careful when he attaches his name to a published book that will probably fall into the hands of a merciless reviewer; he should be as careful about claiming a product his own if he realized it was going on public sale, even the limited public sale of a microfilm edition. But he does not worry so much about the typescript of his dissertation, which almost by tradition has come to be regarded as the preliminary draft of something he may pick up and make publishable later, if he ever gets around to it.

Another university officer, the manager of the university press, is concerned about the situation. On the one hand he is under pressure to publish, or at least to consider for publication, a great many manuscripts which have come to his desk with the certification of his university as contributions to knowledge but which he knows would run his operation even deeper in the red if they were published. On the other hand he must have the uneasy feeling that this same grist mill is turning out saleable products that he never sees or hears about. A university press might well consider the question of an auxiliary series published in microfilm, microcard, or a near-print process; demand might give an early clue as to which titles should be singled out for wider distribution. These are things a university archivist begins to appreciate as he is drawn into the thesis problem.

The graduate student himself, the author of the thesis or dissertation, has a considerable interest in this whole question. He may have rather bright-eyed expectations of almost immediate publication, preferably by a commercial publisher so that he can be reimbursed in part for his efforts. But if the big publishing houses insist on being short-sighted, he will take second choice and allow the university to publish his work, letting it stand as a monument to the fact that he gave his work to the world "free." (He does not understand the economics of present-day publishing.) The thing he demands of the university archivist is a promise that his brain child will not be turned over to the library for promiscuous interlibrary lending, lest some literary pirate steal his stuff before he gets it in print himself. He is vaguely aware of the fact that library deposit without copyright does constitute a form of publication which means he has given away his literary property in such a way that he can claim no credit for it. He is not going to be happy about selling advance microfilm copies. Another type of candidate may also present himself to the archivist with a similar plea to have his work suppressed, but for a different reason. This is the man who wants a degree but wants to keep his thesis a secret. It could embarrass him; it might even get him into trouble. For example, one of this stripe once took the precaution to find out if a thesis in the form of a biography of a living person could be kept sealed during the lifetime of the biographee and for 25 years thereafter. The trouble, it seems, was that although he could tell the true story he could not really prove it! These two types are the extremes; in between, most of the candidates are rather realistic about the whole business. It does not make much difference what happens because

they know that unpublished dissertations for the most part only beget more of their kind, which are in turn buried in archival oblivion. Still, the questions of protecting literary property and of copyright procedure are matters a university archivist must be prepared to explain. The very least he should know is that microfilm publication can be copyrighted, and how it is done.

The interest of librarians in theses is something else again. They and the scholars they serve (unlike the university official, who is interested in the theses of his own university, and unlike the graduate student, who really cares only about his own thesis) are interested in all theses and dissertations everywhere. They are interested in the interlibrary lending of theses — which means, of course, that they are both borrowers and lenders. They want to get from other libraries everything they ask for, and they want to be able to reciprocate by lending everything requested of them. By common agreement, librarians do not ask to borrow or expect to loan books that are available at a reasonable purchase price or that are in heavy local use; if a library owns a rare book or manuscript, it is not expected to lend it but rather to sell a microfilm copy. The librarians are very likely to come to complete agreement in abandoning the interlibrary lending of theses and dissertations, substituting the sale of microfilm copies, which will be less expensive to both parties of any given transaction. But the interest of librarians in theses extends beyond interlibrary lending. Librarians also perform reference, bibliographical, and searching functions for their clientele. It follows that librarians are interested in the bibliographical control, abstracting, and partial publication of theses. One device of bibliographical control is published by the H. W. Wilson Company for the Association of Research Libraries, *Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Libraries*; another is *Dissertation Abstracts*, published by University Microfilms; another is cataloging by the Library of Congress; and still others are abstracts or lists published for special subject fields. On the whole, doctoral dissertations are under some degree of bibliographical control, but masters' theses are not; and abstract publication is more common in the science fields than in the humanities or social sciences. The university archivist has an obligation to know about these problems of bibliography and abstracting; fortunately, he can refer most of his questions to the librarians who are actively engaged in the work.

Finally there is the interest of the university archivist himself in the thesis problem. If microfilm or some other micropublication is adopted by his university, he may have to consider revision of the

specifications for physical format. The master negative microfilm may replace the typescript as the official copy. If this happens, will it be a 35 mm. or a 16 mm. microfilm? How will he advise candidates (and perhaps the graduate division) as to specifications on the use of color illustrations, on the maximum size of folded plates or maps, on the quality of photographic or other illustrative material in the thesis? Almost any university archivist could dig out of his files a thesis that would not make a satisfactory microfilm in black and white. Should the typescript be bound at all if its main function is to serve as the copy from which a microfilm will be made? As color will become a more critical factor, will not the permanent qualities of the original paper and inking become less important? It would be a very unrealistic archivist indeed who did not regard his records with due and careful reference to the use to be made of them.

Microfilm publication, or some inexpensive limited edition process such as microcard publication, would seem to answer most of the problems that arise as a university archivist meets the various persons who are interested in his files of theses and dissertations. University Microfilms, Inc., in Ann Arbor is a commercial firm that has been in the business of microfilm publication of doctoral dissertations for over a decade.[3] Therefore the idea can hardly be called new or the practice untried. Mr. Silver, in his article in the *ACLS Newsletter*, reported that 17 institutions[4] had made arrangements with University Microfilms; and there are various levels of participation provided or projected in the University Microfilms project. For example, a UCLA graduate recently had his dissertation published by University Microfilms, even though the archivist refused to lend the original typescript and insisted upon having the UCLA library photographic service make the negative microfilm for University Microfilms. Universities may still prefer, especially if they have a heavy investment in their own photographic laboratories, to do their own thesis microfilm publishing with the "imprint" of the university library or the university press. In any event, univer-

[3] Eugene B. Power, "Microfilm Publication of Doctoral Dissertations," in *Journal of Documentary Reproduction* (March 1942), pp. 37-44. "University Microfilms — A Microfilming Service for Scholars," in *The Journal of Documentation*, II (June 1946), pp. 23-31, esp. 27-29. Mr. Power is president of University Microfilms. *Microfilm Abstracts* changed its format and title with vol. XII (1952), becoming *Dissertation Abstracts*. The introduction to this publication mentions levels of participation and invites interested persons to write for details.

[4] On June 29, 1952, it was reported that the number had risen to 27 university libraries participating in *Dissertation Abstracts* and the expanded program offered by University Microfilms in response to the request of the ARL.

sity archivists everywhere should watch the developments that are likely to result from the recent investigations of the Association of Research Libraries.

What conclusion can be drawn from this discussion? Unfortunately, a rather weak one: The university archivist should continue alert to the possibilities of the micropublication of theses and dissertations, because his university may enter into the field directly or indirectly. If no better conclusion than this can be offered, at least the decision of UCLA as to microfilm publication should be stated, together for reasons leading to that decision. Alas, at the present writing the final decision is still pending. One thing is certain, microfilming of all theses (both masters' theses and doctors' dissertations) has been started at UCLA as routine archival procedure. We evidently think that the librarians mean business.