An Internship

By Maxine Kennedy
Acquisitions Librarian
National Library of Medicine

IN THE early days of professional education, the apprentice system imparted required knowledge of procedures and techniques. In this day some correlation of training and experience would still seem to be desirable if the library school graduate is to be effective in his first position. The concept of an internship following school training is not new in the library field, even though the term internship is not usually associated with a library. In an article in the June 1941 issue of the BULLETIN, Colonel Harold W. Jones predicted the use of the Army Medical Library as a training institution, visualizing a postgraduate training course in medical librarianship for young graduates of library schools. Not until 1957, however, was such a training course established at the now National Library of Medicine. The program was designed to provide, through a year's special training for three participants, a broadly based work experience upon which an intern can build a career in medical librarianship. The internship promised many advantages to me as a newly graduated library school student in 1958, but at the same time it posed some uncertainty as to its functions and value. As it turned out, the program provided practical experience and an understanding of the many phases of a large library's program as well as an integrating of theory and practice.

The program began with a week's thorough orientation to the responsibilities and functions of the library, following an introductory tour of all work areas. The schedule was arranged so that in the twelve-month period there were three rotation periods of three months each to the Acquisition Division, Catalog Division, and Reference Division, with the remaining three months divided among the Office of the Director, the History of Medicine Division, and the Index Division. The intern took up, in each division, all the operations of that branch of library work. Professional rather than clerical duties were emphasized; at the same time, it was important to learn procedures themselves through practice and observation. In conjunction with this rotational schedule, the intern attended meetings of professional associations; he visited other libraries in the area; he attended meetings and seminars conducted by the Director and the Division Chiefs. The intern also read assigned material on medical and library subjects.

The three months in the Acquisition Division were efficiently organized to allow an appropriate amount of time to each section—the selection and searching work, ordering operations, and serials—for performing the pertinent duties. Special projects assigned to the interns were carefully chosen and well directed; these included an evaluative survey of book dealers according to the percentage of orders received, and the construction of a flow chart of the main operations of the division just prior to major organizational changes.

The period spent in the Catalog Division was arranged to permit study of methods of classification and subject heading, and to engage in the cataloging of monographs and serials, recataloging of the old collection, catalog maintenance routines, and card editorial processes.

In the time scheduled for the Reference Division, experience was gained both in the quick reference work and short bibliographies familiar to every librarian and in the more difficult problems whose solution requires time and a bit of creative imagination.

The seminar and visit program was as carefully planned and carried out as the more immediately practical portion of the internship. The seminars, which included other members of the professional staff, were both informative and interesting, particularly because they presented background information on policies underlying the functions of each division, and because they analyzed current projects such as the new subject heading authority list, the plans for the new building, and the new *Index Medicus* mechanized system of publication. The visits to other libraries, aside from being enjoyable excursions, afforded the opportunity to observe different administrative and organization patterns and provided new insights. As an intern I found the frequent individual conferences with the Division Chiefs, in which we discussed various problems or matters of policy, of great practical value in supplementing the actual work assignments. An over-view of the administration of the divisions brings into focus the relationships of the diverse functions within the Library which may not be immediately apparent while one is participating closely in the work of each division.

The planning of my internship program was of course greatly influenced by the experience the previous year with the first group of interns. Although carefully scheduled, the program was flexible to individual interests and circumstance. The program is now in its fourth year, and each year's experience has enabled the Library to smooth out some wrinkles, and to try variations in scheduling.

The intern has as an immediate gain from the program in an additional

year of planned study and a period of first-hand experience as practical preparation for his career. Clearly, it seems to me, there is no mechanism of greater value than the internship for providing a solid grounding in the essential tasks of medical librarianship, and for instilling a "confidence to perform" in its new practitioners.