

## The Historical Contributions of William S. Dix to American University Library Services: A Post-print

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### Abstract

William S. Dix was a distinguished American librarian in the 20th century and an eminent contributor to the development of university libraries in the United States. Throughout his 27-year professional career, he served successively as library director at Rice University and Princeton University, making outstanding contributions to the advancement of American university libraries. On one hand, Dix engaged in profound contemplation regarding the functions of university libraries, collection organization, and the competency requirements for library administrators, thereby establishing a distinctive theoretical framework of library science. On the other hand, he spearheaded the development of residential college libraries, participated actively in American Library Association affairs and international initiatives, and fostered the progress of American librarianship through practical endeavors. Even today, Dix's library practices and intellectual contributions remain profoundly instructive for contemporary library scholars.

### Full Text

#### William S. Dix's Historical Contribution to American University Library Development

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### Abstract

William S. Dix was a prominent American librarian in the 20th century and an outstanding contributor to American university library development. During

his 27-year library career, he served as library director at Rice University and Princeton University, making remarkable contributions to the advancement of American academic libraries. On one hand, Dix developed profound insights into the functions of university libraries, book arrangement, and professional qualifications for librarians, constructing a distinctive theoretical framework of library science. On the other hand, he promoted the establishment of residential college libraries, participated in American Library Association activities, and engaged in international library work, advancing American librarianship through practical efforts. To this day, Dix's library practices and ideas continue to offer important enlightenment for contemporary library scholars.

**Keywords:** William S. Dix; university library; United States; history

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## 1. Dix's Life and Library Career

William S. Dix was born in Virginia and demonstrated broad interests from childhood, particularly a passion for reading, aspiring to pursue a career in literature. He later attended the University of Virginia, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in 1931, becoming a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He subsequently obtained his Master's degree in English from the same university. Dix began his professional career with a nine-year teaching position at Darlington School in Georgia, followed by roles in adult education institutions in Cleveland, Ohio. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and served as an English instructor at Case Western Reserve University before joining the faculty at Williams College from 1942 to 1944, and later at Harvard University from 1944 to 1946 as director of the Radio Research Laboratory while also teaching English.

In 1946, Dix was appointed librarian at Rice Institute (now Rice University), marking the beginning of his distinguished library career. Despite lacking formal training in library science, Dix believed that library administrators should possess solid academic foundations. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to his work and quickly earned the respect of his colleagues. During his tenure at Rice, Dix articulated his vision for the ideal library, emphasizing that expanding the collection should be the primary mission. He also served as chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee from 1951 to 1953, advocating for freedom of reading and opposing censorship.

In 1953, Dix moved to Princeton University as Associate Professor of English and Librarian, a position he held until his retirement in 1978. At Princeton, he led the construction of the Julian Street Library, a residential college library that significantly alleviated pressure on the main Firestone Library. The library adopted Harvard's Quincy House book classification system, with collections configured around university curricula, making it highly beneficial for teaching activities. Dix became one of the most widely traveled library directors in

America, frequently representing the United States at UNESCO conferences and other international meetings. He passed away in 1978 due to heart disease.

## **2. Dix' s Contributions to American Library Development**

### **2.1 Leadership at Rice and Princeton Universities**

Dix' s tenure at Rice and Princeton University marked a period of significant advancement for both institutions' libraries. At Rice, he transformed the library into a central educational resource, abandoning traditional reserve reading rooms in favor of a large, browsable collection. His leadership style emphasized that the library' s fundamental purpose was to provide books to students and scholars promptly and efficiently.

At Princeton, Dix oversaw the library' s expansion from 1.2 million to 2.5 million volumes, providing substantial support for teaching and research. He championed the concept of residential college libraries, establishing the Julian Street Library to serve students in the dormitory area. This innovative approach offered several advantages: it brought library services closer to students, reduced pressure on the main library, and created a more intimate learning environment. The library featured quality art reproductions and popular science books for non-scientists, attracting the attention of scientific humanists.

### **2.2 Advocacy for Intellectual Freedom**

Dix was a staunch defender of intellectual freedom. As chair of the ALA' s Intellectual Freedom Committee from 1951 to 1953, he led efforts to combat censorship and protect the freedom to read. His work culminated in the landmark "Freedom to Read" statement, which he co-authored with Archibald MacLeish and others. The statement proclaimed that books are among humanity' s greatest tools and that libraries must be homes of free inquiry. Dix argued that librarians have a responsibility to defend this freedom, allowing readers to choose from diverse viewpoints without restriction. During the McCarthy era, when anti-communist sentiment led to calls for censorship, Dix firmly opposed such measures, asserting that libraries should present multiple perspectives and allow users to judge for themselves.

### **2.3 National and International Leadership**

Dix played a crucial role in shaping national library policy. He was instrumental in the passage of what became known as the "Dix Amendment" to the Higher Education Act of 1965, which authorized the Library of Congress' s National Program for Acquisition and Cataloging (NPAC). This program systematically collected scholarly materials from around the world, creating printed catalog cards and bibliographic information for resource sharing among libraries. The amendment provided federal funding to support cooperative cataloging efforts, significantly reducing cataloging costs and improving efficiency.

Internationally, Dix served as a U.S. delegate to UNESCO, attending numerous conferences and promoting multilateral cooperation in library development. He believed that providing aid through international organizations was more effective than bilateral assistance and could help build libraries in underserved regions. Dix emphasized that international exchange and cooperation were essential for the long-term progress of global librarianship, particularly in promoting the free flow of ideas and fostering mutual understanding among nations.

## **2.4 Professionalization of Librarianship**

Dix was a strong advocate for library professionalization. He served on numerous ALA committees, including as chair of the International Relations Committee (1957-1960) and the Activities Committee on New Directions (ACONDA). His leadership helped the ALA navigate challenging periods and maintain effective operations. Dix believed that librarians must play prominent roles in non-governmental organizations and civic activities, reflecting the characteristic American engagement in public service.

# **3. Dix' s Library Science Philosophy**

## **3.1 Subject-Based Book Arrangement**

Dix developed a coherent philosophy of library organization centered on subject-based classification. He argued that as academic library collections grew rapidly, traditional arrangement methods became inadequate. The optimal solution, he contended, was arranging books by subject to facilitate browsing and discovery. Dix believed that a library' s fundamental purpose was to connect readers with needed materials efficiently, and subject arrangement best served this goal.

He advocated for what he called “the arrangement of books” as a core library function, emphasizing that collections should be organized in clear, continuous systems accessible to all users. This approach would enable students to locate relevant materials without consulting card catalogs, saving time and effort. While acknowledging that geographic considerations might require separating subjects across different locations, Dix stressed the importance of maintaining logical consistency and avoiding arbitrary management of collections.

## **3.2 Open-Stack Philosophy**

Dix was a passionate proponent of open-stack libraries, viewing them as essential educational tools. He believed that open stacks allowed users to browse collections freely, discover unexpected resources, and develop research skills. During his tenure at both Rice and Princeton, he implemented open-stack policies that transformed libraries from static repositories into dynamic learning spaces.

Dix argued that open stacks represented the library' s role in the educational process, training scholars to quickly survey books and locate needed materials. He emphasized that libraries should provide adequate reading and study spaces

with comfortable, well-lit seating, and that borrowing books should be free of charge. This philosophy reflected his broader vision of libraries as organic wholes serving the entire academic community.

### 3.3 Professional Qualifications for Librarians

Dix articulated clear standards for library professionals. He maintained that academic librarians should be scholars in their own right, though not necessarily specialists with deep attainment in a single field. Rather, they should be broadly educated individuals who understood research, appreciated various types of collections, and could communicate effectively with faculty and students.

For library administrators, Dix outlined specific time allocation: approximately 40% for internal operations, 40% for fundraising and community relations, and 20% for other activities. He emphasized that directors should be energetic leaders who could secure financial support and public endorsement for their institutions. Librarians needed to understand library theory and procedures thoroughly while maintaining creativity, foresight, and compassion in public service.

### 3.4 Library's Educational Mission

Dix consistently emphasized that university libraries' primary mission was to support education and research. He argued against creating separate facilities for undergraduates, instead advocating for placing them in excellent library environments under the guidance of mature scholars. The library's resource system, he maintained, provided crucial support for undergraduate education.

He viewed libraries as complete records of civilization, carrying humanity's intellectual achievements and promoting mutual understanding among peoples. During the Cold War era, Dix saw libraries as instruments for building peace, helping people seek understanding through rational thought and reading. He believed that by fostering understanding among nations and races, libraries could help eliminate ideological confrontations and remove obstacles for social change and cultural progress.

## Conclusion

William S. Dix stands as a pivotal figure in American academic librarianship. Despite lacking formal library training, his scholarly background, administrative acumen, and unwavering commitment to intellectual freedom made him an ideal model for academic librarians. His systematic thought on library functions, book arrangement, and professional standards, combined with his practical contributions to library development, international cooperation, and professionalization, continue to offer valuable lessons for contemporary university library development. His legacy reflects the liberal intellectual spirit of mid-20th century Amer-

ica and demonstrates how visionary leadership can transform institutions and professions.

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