

Opinion

The Evans Library — a sorority house in disguise?

A impotent behemoth shoddy and scary — what can it be but our own library?



Mark Nair

Me, circa 1988

OK, kids, now time for a few words about the state of higher education in our very own beloved country of Texas A&M. Today, we tackle that promising and vulnerable issue: libraries. Now, all of my friends (one) at other universities (one) usually often always sometimes more than others scoff at my attempts (once) to describe my research attempts (many) at our very own, famous for nothing, Sterling C. Evans library.

"Whaddia mean, library," my buds would all say simultaneously, careful to announce the word "library" and not "libraries."

"Yeah," I would respond with my usual witty retort.

"Arf, arf, arf," they would laugh, thinking themselves quite funny.

"But we've got a swell football team.

Rah, rah." That shut them up. It always does.

I admit, I went to the library the other day for a little bit of research, a little bit of journal reading and a lot a bit of exercise looking for my little bit of research and little bit of journal reading. On my way to our sprawling Sterling C. Evans metropolis, I was accosted by a strange little fellow wearing a strange little red and orange raincoat.

"Pssst, steel umbrellas, 35 bucks." He talked out of the side of his mouth.

"Steel umbrellas?" I asked, bemused. I struck an imposing, quizzical pose.

"Steel, that's right." The strange fellow looked around nervously. "They'll protect you against any size library bricks that might happen to fall on your head, if you catch my drift."

I looked up. The library loomed above me. Pink insulation stuck out between cracks in the bricks. There were gaps in the walls and ceiling but some smart someone covered up most of them with cardboard.

"Thirty bucks," he announced. "Stay alive and support the football team." But then a chunk of the sixth floor the size of Albuquerque fell on his head and sent him straight to China.

With a gentle yet concerned shrug of my shoulders, I continued on my way. The automatic library doors (stunning reminders of supermarket doors) were stuck in the "open" as opposed to "closed" position. But library users usually prefer a convenient entry to an entry where one must wait (those few precious nano-seconds) for it to open.

Now, for those of you new to town, a few words about THE library:

Our library, dedicated to something — I'm not quite sure what, has a few important goals that I should note here (just for clarification, of course). The following compose The Big Six Library Principles with which we should all be very familiar —

Principle 1: To be considered socially active, trips to the library are a must. Indeed, research and studying are out of the question.

Q: Where are you going?

A: To the library.

Q: Oh, going to pick up some babes, eh?

A: You betcha.

Q and A: Ah, ha ha ha ha.

Principle 2: Card catalog? That's antique. Try the ALIS computer system.

Principle 3: ALIS is always down.

Principle 4: I'm sorry, we have only 1 copy of that book.

Principle 5: Journals? What are journals?

Principle 6 — in case of emergency: The shuttle bus to U.T. isn't really that expensive.

Principle 7: Never kill a human being. (Oh, I'm sorry. That's an Asimov robotic rule. Doesn't apply to the library.)

Last semester, when I was on one of my romps through the library in search of some important political science document or something like that, I happened upon an interesting piece of paper floating listlessly around the fourth floor. I grabbed it and examined it (as I have the habit of doing with all listless pieces of paper) and noticed that it contained a list of strange and bizarre sounding names, i.e. Buffy, Zowie, Meg, Trish, Brutus. Ah, ha, I exclaimed silently, a SORORITY. And in the LIBRARY at that! Will wonders never cease?

I then noticed that it was study time

for the sorority sisters. I noticed that that said sisters must sign in in order to prove that they have actually studied, then noticed that said sisters, after having signed said list, sit down to unshutable and commence discussing said items that, after Principle 1 is memorized by you, the reader, I do not have to illuminate. Thus we have the way the way is was, and unfortunately, the way it may continue to be for our library.

So, I call for cops to patrol our beloved halls. You know the kind I mean. Big, lunky guys with names like Butch, Zowie, Meg, Trish and Brutus. The kind of guys who shoot first and never would even think of asking questions.

And then, after that, maybe we can get more books.

And then, after that, maybe we can get more journals.

And then, after that, maybe we can turn the whole thing into one big parking garage complete with its very own computer controlled phallic-like tower that rings cheery little tunes everytime the football teams scores a touchdown or Jackie Sherrill get a raise. Rah.

Mark Nair is a graduate student and opinion page editor for The Battalion.

Is that the best you could do with the library, Dr. Hoadley?

The following is an open letter to Dr. Irene Hoadley, Director of the Sterling C. Evans Library.

Dr. Larry Hickman
Guest Columnist

Dear Dr. Hoadley:

As part of the ongoing discussion between members of the faculty and your office, you have told us that the library's holdings in Liberal Arts will never be first rate. You have told us that you do not have, nor can you obtain, the resources to enable the proper cataloging and storage of those books in the Evans Library that members of the faculty deem of special value, and therefore worthy of special protection. You have told us that it is only a matter of some unspecified amount of time until we will have an adequate catalogue of our holdings (which, I must add, we have not had during the fifteen years I have been a faculty member at Texas A&M). Perhaps these matters are not within your power to control. At least that is what you have told us.

Since you are the director of the Evans Library, however, I must assume that there are at least some matters which you control. I therefore pose the following questions. Why, when our university is seventh in terms of size, and eighth in terms of its endowments, is our library ranked the 48th in the nation? Why have you cancelled interlibrary loan services which allow free access by faculty to materials which, as you

say, we should never expect to have in our own collection? Why do you expect the faculty to do the job done by professional bibliographers at every other major library? Why is the University of Texas spending almost two dollars on their library for every one dollar we spend on ours? Why did the University of Texas buy three times as many books in 1986-87 as did our library? Why do we have only 311 staff members for our library whereas they have 577 for theirs?

But I must ask even a more basic question, the answer to which can surely not be that you lack funding. Why is our library the noisiest of any in which I have worked during the last 25 years? My work has taken me to libraries in third world countries where readers move their lips: those libraries were invariably quieter than the Evans Library. Why do your card-catalogers form groups of three and four to discuss their social affairs at voice levels that make concentrated use of the catalogue impossible? Why do their supervisors allow them to do so, instead of maintaining our sadly neglected catalogue? Why do members of your cleaning and maintenance staff feel free to converse with one another at distances of fifty feet and more on all six floors? Why cannot cleaning and maintenance be done during times that library usage is minimal? Why are not group study prohibitions enforced in areas designated for individual study? Why does the Learning Resources Division not have better



sound insulation? Why are the staff of the Development Foundation not requested to restrict their conversations as they move from their sixth floor offices through the study tables to the elevators? It is a disgrace that a student can graduate after four years at Texas A&M University and never have experienced what is regarded as a normal study environment by the administrators of most major university libraries.

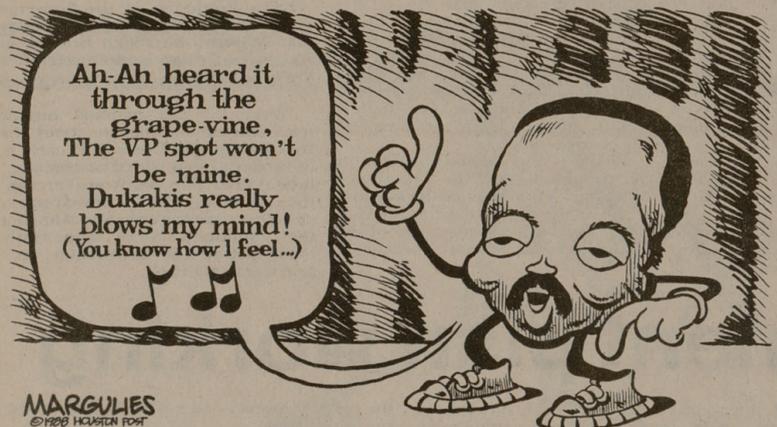
Texas A&M University has many honors to bestow on its faculty and staff. You have received one of the highest: you are the holder of an endowed chair.

But with major honors also come major responsibilities. I call upon you to exercise the leadership which will make the Evans Library a place where our faculty will not be ashamed to bring their colleagues from other universities. I call upon you to administer a library that is more than a warehouse for books and a place for conversation. Can you not take steps to ensure that we have a library that is a fit place to browse, to think, to do scholarly work?

These questions will come as no surprise to you, for I and others have been putting them to you personally and in

group meetings for some years. But since I hear them voiced more frequently, and since many of these matters have assumed crisis proportions, I thought that you might like a chance to respond to them in a public way: to inform the readers of *The Battalion* — the students, the faculty, the administrators, members of the Board of Regents, the former students of Texas A&M University — of your plans to solve these difficulties.

Dr. Larry Hickman
associate professor of Philosophy and Humanities



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