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# Friends of the Library Groups in Health Sciences Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

The Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center (HAM-TMC) Library collected data on friends of the library groups from 103 health sciences libraries, using a mail questionnaire. Sixteen of the responding libraries had independent friends groups; seven had friends groups that were subordinate to a university group. The sixteen independent groups gave as their major purposes (1) to raise money for their associated library and (2) to develop support for their library. These groups contributed an average of \$4,870 a year to their libraries, the money being used primarily to purchase rare books and working-collection books and to sponsor social events. The subordinate groups contributed relatively little money to the health sciences libraries responding to the survey.

FRIENDS of the library groups typically exist to support library activities and programs that are outside the formal administrative structure of the library. Friends groups, being independent of the legal or budgetary apparatus of the libraries with which they are associated, can provide support of particular activities that might be difficult to justify to a funding agency. In addition to the independence of friends groups, a very important (perhaps the most important) factor motivating libraries to form friends groups is the additional monetary support that such groups can provide in these days of tight budgets.

Information on friends of the library groups in health sciences libraries is almost nonexistent, making it impossible either for libraries contemplating forming friends groups to know what to expect from such groups, or for libraries already having friends groups to evaluate them. The Friends of the Texas Medical Center Library, the friends group associated with the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library (HAM-TMC), found this lack of information when it attempted to evaluate its contributions to the HAM-TMC Library vis-à-vis the contributions of other similar groups to their associated libraries. They subsequently asked the executive director of the library to conduct a study that would gather the necessary data that

would allow the group to evaluate itself. This article is a report on that study.

The study was patterned closely on a study conducted in 1974 by Tulane University through the Systems and Procedures Exchange Center of the Association of Research Libraries [1]. That study did not collect statistics on health sciences libraries, or at least did not report them separately, so it served only as a model for the study being reported here, and comparisons of the data from the earlier study with those collected from the HSLs are not meaningful here.

## RESULTS

Letters with accompanying questionnaires were sent to 105 health sciences libraries in late May 1977 requesting data on any friends group in the libraries surveyed. The libraries selected for inclusion in the survey were chosen from those listed in the *Directory of Health Sciences Libraries in the United States, 1973* [2] and the *1976-77 Directory of the Medical Library Association* [3]. Generally, the basis for selection of the libraries was that the library had at least 50,000 volumes in its collection or subscribed to at least 1,000 journals.

After a follow-up letter had been sent, the total response rate to the questionnaire was a remarkable 98% (103 out of 105), indicating both the cooperativeness of health sciences libraries and their interest in friends groups. The distribution of the responses to the first question is shown in Table 1. It quickly became clear when we considered the "yes" responses that this figure was misleading because of the pattern of the relationships between some friends groups and their responding libraries. Seven of the libraries responded affirmatively to this question, but the friends group they referred to was actually affiliated with a university library, of which the health sciences library was a branch. In these situations, it was obvious from the data that the HSLs benefited little if at all from the activities of the friends group. It seemed preferable, therefore, in reporting the data from the survey, to separate these libraries from those HSLs having independent friends groups. Addi-

TABLE 1  
NUMBER OF LIBRARIES HAVING FRIENDS OF THE  
LIBRARY GROUPS

Response	No. and % of libraries
Yes	24 (23.3%)
No	69 (67.0%)
One under consideration	10 ( 9.7%)
Total	103 (100%)

tionally, one library responded affirmatively to this question yet did not fit well into the other response categories, having simply an endowment program for journal subscriptions. The major portion of the remainder of this article, therefore, will be based on the sixteen responding libraries that had independent friends groups, with a short discussion of the subordinate groups later. A list of the sixteen libraries with independent friends groups is included in the Appendix.

The sixteen independent friends groups that were identified in the survey are relatively young, nearly half of them having been formed in the last seven years. The responses to the question "When was the group formed?" fell into the ranges shown in Table 2.

There was a very wide range of size of membership in the friends groups, as shown by Table 3.

The apparent interest in friends groups by persons outside of the libraries with which the groups are associated is strikingly revealed by the data in Table 4 showing who was instrumental in founding the groups. As can be seen, the impetus for founding friends groups seems to come at least as much from outside the library as from within.

By an overwhelming majority, the most important objective of the friends groups surveyed is to raise funds for the library, followed distantly by the objective of developing support for the library. Only one other objective of a group was given, that

TABLE 2  
YEAR OF FOUNDING OF FRIENDS GROUPS

Year of founding	No. and % of libraries
up to 1950	2 (12.5%)
1951-1960	4 (25.0%)
1961-1970	3 (18.7%)
1971-	7 (43.8%)
Total	16 (100.0%)

TABLE 3  
NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE FRIENDS GROUPS

Minimum	9
Maximum	760
Mean	237
Median	113

TABLE 4  
GROUPS INSTRUMENTAL IN FOUNDING THE  
FRIENDS GROUPS

Group	No. and % of groups
The library	3 (18.7%)
Outside individuals	2 (12.5%)
Combined effort of library and outside individuals	11 (68.8%)
Total	16 (100.0%)

being restoration of the collection. The applicable data are shown in Table 5.

The close relationships between the friends groups and their libraries is shown by the fact that very few friends groups have either to perform their own secretarial work or to reimburse the library for such assistance. (See Table 6.)

Probably of greatest interest to those who are contemplating forming friends groups, as well as to those libraries already having such groups, is the amount of money that can be expected annually from a friends group. For the sixteen responding libraries (fourteen of which supplied the dollar-support figures), there was a wide range of support, as is shown by the figures in Table 7. It can be seen, then, that on the average, the health sciences libraries with independent friends groups receive almost \$5,000 per year from their groups.

The nature of friends groups is best revealed by the uses to which the funds they contribute to

TABLE 5  
OBJECTIVES OF FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUPS

Objective	No. listing this objective	Rank of objective
To raise funds for the library	15	1 (14 responses)
To develop support for the library	7	2 (7 responses)
To restore collection	1	1

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUPS

TABLE 6  
TYPE OF SUPPORT GIVEN THE FRIENDS GROUPS  
BY AFFILIATED LIBRARIES

Type of support	No. and % of libraries
No administrative support by library	2 (12.5%)
Library reimbursed by group for administrative support	2 (12.5%)
Library provides support at no charge to group	12 (75.0%)
Total	16 (100.0%)

TABLE 7  
ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF FRIENDS GROUPS

Amount	Dollar equivalents
Minimum	\$ 500
Maximum	12,000
Mean	4,870
Median	4,750

their libraries are put. Although many different uses of funds were revealed in the survey, the rare-book emphasis of friends groups is clearly evident, with support of the libraries' working collections falling comparatively far behind. The data supporting these conclusions are shown in Table 8.

Publishing newsletters, journals, and similar

publications is a common use of the funds of friends groups. The samples of such publications sent in response to the questionnaire were generally very impressive in terms of graphic quality and literary style. Particularly impressive were the materials sent to its members by the Friends of the Library of the Health Sciences, the University of Illinois at the Medical Center. Included in those materials were a Christmas card and a large, specially printed calendar. Other groups' publications included newsletters, reprints of lectures, and journals describing the collections of the rare-book department of the library.

SUBORDINATE FRIENDS GROUPS

As noted earlier, seven of the responding libraries had friends of the library groups that were subordinate to university-library friends groups. These seven groups made, on the average, many fewer contributions to the HSL than did the friends groups directly associated with HSLs. Compared with the average of \$4,800 contributed by independent friends groups, the subordinate groups contributed less than \$1,000 to their associated health sciences library. Several of the directors of the HSLs that fell within this category mentioned the problem of competition with the university library for both funds and members. Although such a relationship with its "parent" library is clearly not as advantageous to the health sciences library as being independent of it, one wonders if political realities do not dictate that the relationship remain as it is.

TABLE 8  
PURPOSES FOR WHICH FRIENDS' FUNDS ARE SPENT

Purpose	No. of libraries using funds for this purpose	Rank-order of importance*; no. in rank in parentheses
Rare books	9	1(7), 2(1), 5(1)
Working-collection books	7	1(3), 2(2), 3(1), 4(1)
Journal subscriptions	3	1(1), 3(1), 4(1)
Exhibits, displays, publicity	5	2(1), 3(1), 4(1), 5(1)
Lectures	3	2(1), 3(1)
Publications	5	2(4), 3(1)
Social events	6	2(1), 3(2), 4(1), 6(1)
Awards or scholarships	1	—
Binding	1	3(1)
History of medicine books	1	1(1)
Restoration	2	1(2)
Endowment	1	1(1)

\*The number of ranks given may not equal the number of libraries giving this as a purpose because of the failure by some libraries to indicate ranks.

## DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of friends of the library groups in health sciences libraries clearly is to raise money to support various programs of the libraries, most commonly rare-book programs. Most friends groups do meet this objective to some extent, as witnessed by the average annual contribution to their associated libraries of about \$4,800. Whether this level of support should be considered as fully meeting the goals of a friends group cannot be answered here, however. Maintaining the activity of a friends group requires a good deal of library support, if only in typing and mailing. In addition, several library directors noted that they had problems with recruiting members or keeping the interest of the group up.

One director frankly questioned whether "the level at which [the friends group's] objectives are achieved justify the time and effort." Such a question can only be answered by each library.

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX

## HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIES HAVING INDEPENDENT FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY GROUPS

State	Library
CA	Loma Linda University, Vernier Radcliffe Memorial Library
CT	Yale Medical Library
FL	University of Miami, Louis Calder Memorial Library
IL	University of Illinois Medical Center, Library of the Health Sciences
KY	University of Louisville, Kornhauser Health Sciences Library
MA	Harvard University Medical School, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine
MI	Wayne State University, Vera Schiffman Medical Library
NY	Albany Medical College, Schaffer Library of Health Sciences
NY	New York Academy of Medicine Library
NY	New York University Medical Center Library
NY	State University of New York at Buffalo, Health Sciences Library
NC	Duke University, Medical Center Library
OH	Cleveland Medical Library Association, Howard Dittrick Museum
TX	Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library
TX	The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas Library
TX	The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Library