Let’s do this!
30 policy memos for updating today’s libraries

Edited by Kate Williams

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
School of Information Sciences

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In the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, in a year of racial reckoning, with climate emergencies bearing down on the United States as never before, two sections of the MSLIS course “Libraries, Information and Society” at the University of Illinois wrote some very practical documents. They wrote to their own libraries—to libraries they hope to work at—to community organizations with collections—to their library school—and to policymakers who act on libraries. They wrote memos proposing real solutions to current problems as they defined them.

New conditions demand new library directions. When the U.S. locked down for Covid-19, most libraries did not. They set aside the old normal and invented new services for their communities in crisis. In other words, libraries made a creative leap. These memos extend that.

In class we put a high value on each memo. We celebrated when the first one went into an actual workplace. We offer them here for us all to consult, use, mashup, and change libraries for the better.

Associate Professor Kate Williams, katewill@illinois.edu

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In the past few decades, emergencies seem to happen with greater and greater frequency. The more typical emergencies are weather-related disasters and, unfortunately, unexplained events of violence and the community responses from such acts. In the northern Illinois area, the more expected weather disasters would be tornadoes, excessive rain, excessive snowfall, and excessive cold. Unexplained acts of violence would most likely be shootings in the community and the response from shootings but could include violence and destruction of the library and its property. The library buildings, property, and staff will all benefit from developing a disaster response plan before these events occur. This memo will specifically deal with preparing staff for action before, during and after emergencies.

The first step in the personnel action plan is to decide how the plan will be established, that is, will it be the responsibility of a group of employees, volunteers, board members or a mix? Will we seek the expertise of the local police and fire departments? Is there a community mental health center that could provide guidance? How will we make sure we address every possibility? If changes need to be made or education programs put in place for staff, how will these be paid for? An exploratory document listing the questions and practical solutions might be the best thing to tackle first and then decide how and when the complete plans will be developed and paid for.

A good team can be defined by the resiliency of its members. After interviewing nearly 2,000 NCAA coaches, Bradley Kirkman and his team found that resilient teams have at least four things in common.

1. They have a shared mental model of teamwork formed by asking the members what they believe it is. They define the roles and responsibilities and the ways to interact with each other during adversity. The teammates’ emergency positions need to be well-defined and shared among team members and address concerns before the emergency happens.

2. Teams and teammates must have the ability to improvise and the autonomy to do so. If one is waiting for permission, the problem might expand or the window in which to attend to the issue may disappear altogether.
3. Resilient teams trust and feel safe with one another and their leaders. If everyone feels safe with each other, authentic mutual respect is one of the highlights of a team. Members feel safe sharing their opinions without fear of ridicule, which can lead to more adversity and lack of trust. Distrust erodes the base for teams and can lead to destruction from within.

4. They believe that they can successfully work together to accomplish the task. This includes valuing each member and their contributions. Everyone has confidence in others and their shared abilities to perform their tasks well. This is where individual resilience comes in, too. They know they can count on each other to adapt and make changes when needed. (Kirkman, et al.)

Delving further into a resilient team, we know we need each member of the team to be individually strong and flexible, too. Heather Craig, a provisional psychologist, writing for positivepsychology.com, indicates the five elements associated with a person’s resilience: positivity, emotional insight/intelligence, balance, spirituality, and reflection. Positivity is defined here as putting energy and motivation into work. Vigor is the opposite of weariness and deliberately inserting such helps build the endurance needed for emergencies and prevents disillusionment and burnout. Having a high EQ or level of awareness of your own emotions and how you experience them helps build resilience by knowing where you are at and if you need support. We need to know how our emotions affect our work and how to control our emotions as situations dictate. Balance refers to the work-life balance that is necessary for a productive individual. We must have times when we disconnect from technology to restore ourselves to a sufficient energy level. Family time, individual time, and time spent outdoors all help to revitalize ourselves. Spirituality, at first seemed off to me, I kept thinking “how does anyone’s spiritual outlook relate to inner strength?” Craig defines it as finding meaning in your work; how does it contribute to the greater good? She also stresses that looking for the positives when in an emergency is also helpful to keep one’s level of stamina up. Finally, reflection is necessary for both teams and individuals dealing with adversity. What triggered me? How were my emotional reactions helpful or not? What do I need to work on? What coping strategies did I rely on that were beneficial and which ones were harmful? (Note: cupcakes, while delicious, are harmful.)

How is all this accomplished? Craig lists four steps for building a resilient team at work. I have added a fifth.

1. **Checklists and Guides**

   Each position needs its standard operating procedure written down and available for everyone. Additionally, ‘go-to’ guides that show how to respond to specific situations and if they escalate or need troubleshooting are necessary, too. Also, consider providing a list of experts: whom to contact for what, and their contact information is helpful and improves autonomy.
2. **Training**

Training develops and promotes team cohesion and coordination. Include challenges for teammates to work through and cognitive challenges if they cannot be recreated. Make sure to answer questions that come up and allow for ways to answer questions that will inevitably come up later, after the activity is finished.

3. **Debriefing Sessions**

After a disaster, stressful event, or training, reflect on what went well and what needs to improve. Action planning by the team will further team cohesion. Ensure that everyone shares their thoughts, not just the leaders or loudmouths. In an emergency, everyone will be counted on to help, so in planning, everyone needs to ask questions or provide their opinions. For chronic emergency events, consider how to plan/correct such activity so it is not an urgent situation every time it happens.

4. **Work Culture**

Leaders need to demonstrate the behaviors they need to see in the team, just like adults need to demonstrate the behaviors they want in their children. Team members need to know that they are encouraged to speak up, openly share unwelcome news, as well as good. Support everyone during an emergency, not just your leader up the flow chart. Consider officially designating emergency modes, so employees know when to use their emergency team skills in specific situations. (Craig)

5. **Recognize, Thank, and Encourage**

I added this step because it is too important to include in the debriefing session. In an emergency, you will frequently find that some people went beyond what they were assigned to do. This behavior needs to be recognized, thanked, and encouraged! This is when cupcakes are needed. By officially supporting the actions of others, we positively build the team attitude. Remember to celebrate the team’s success, too. Thank everyone for their efforts because we all deserve to be recognized. If the emergency is long-term, such as a pandemic, consider celebrating the smaller successes along the way.

Also important are communication and empathy. Mariot Winquist writes that strong, well-developed communication styles and a sense of empathy go a long way in building trust with and among the team members. A leader who listens and actively invites feedback is crucial to preparing for emergencies. To consider other perspectives is to fully evolve your policies to
address all contingencies. Empathy is important in nourishing relationships, so they mature fully. When we are sensitive to others’ emotions, we can solve underlying problems and prevent personnel issues from occurring. (Winquist)

In conclusion, building a resilient team with strong employees will only help the organization. These lists included are a starting point to help prepare your teams, because emergencies of all kinds, like weather-related disasters, and violent events in the community are increasingly common. To not prepare for these events is to deliberately ignore the reality of today. By preparing our staff as well as our building and property, we will show that we care very much about their well-being and that they are valued assets.

References
This pandemic has forever changed everyday life from the way we consume information, access information, and interact with one another. Currently, a lot of people have been leaving their jobs due to lack of support, burnout, and/or inadequate compensation that reflects the cost of living. Given these realities it is now more important than ever for public libraries to act to better evaluate how to better support library staff, library patrons, and evaluate how to manage existing resources. Library management must also have an immediate emergency checklist for when a major event or events such as another global public health pandemic occur. Also, in recent years the number of natural disasters has increased significantly due to climate change. The lack of preventative measures for containment and/or instant assessment measures will negatively impact our local communities. A global pandemic is the one of the most extreme examples of an emergency. However, this mode of thinking and planning for the absolute worst could be helpful to plan for other emergencies that will arise in our communities from time to time.

Emergency management checklists will help establish some order during a stressful and chaotic event. By having a plan or a quick checklist that any of the library staff can carry out will reduce the odds of panic or shock. A delay in response during an emergency will impact efficiency, communication, and trust. Libraries are often located in key strategic points within a community. The services they offer are essential not just to marginalized communities but to an entire neighborhood especially during emergencies. As a result of their strategic locations, library branches are often designated distribution points for assistance such as food, water, care packages, and other social services during an emergency. This emergency checklist also needs to be supported by another general checklist/plan to simultaneously support the library institutions, those within, and the communities they assist. This first immediate checklist should be adaptable and change at least once on a weekly basis.

“Hope for the best but prepare for the worst.”

**Immediate emergency checklist**

1. Call all library staff to make sure they are doing well, who is available to work, and/or need additional support.

2. Evaluate what to eliminate (i.e., tasks, resources, or services)
3. Decide the services and staff that are needed most in the community.

4. Open the lines of communication with local government agencies, city, service organizations, etc.

5. Update all library platforms with relevant/key information i.e., social media, website, phone messages, posted bulletin outside library

6. Keep track of all services provided, staff needs, and resources utilized.

The following below is a list of actions to reduce library staff burnout and turnover, better resource allocation, and overall short-term and long-term management strategies.

**1. In house surveys sent to all library employees**

A complete in-house survey should be provided feedback for management to gauge however employees are holding up. The key points to ask is how can the library management better support them as employees, which are the tasks that are the most difficult to complete/carry out, areas for improvement. Often the front library staff, circulation, public outreach staff, and staff members with similar roles interact more frequently with the local community therefore can provide a much better perspective on what is needed or what can be improved in the community.

**2. Follow up weekly and monthly with all library employees**

Overall, it is important for library management to build an open dialog to encourage constructive feedback on services or working conditions that could be improved. For example, management should at least check in with library employees on a weekly basis to see how everyone is working as a team. In addition, follow up with employees individually at least once monthly to determine how to better provide support or gauge if employees have everything, they need to be successful in fulfilling their responsibilities as well as an opportunity to grow within the organization.

**3. Complete assessment/survey of all resources and services offered**

A complete assessment of all library resources and services should be completed to have a complete picture of the workplace landscape along with the library employees in house surveys. This complete assessment should result in a summary report of which services and/or resources are the most used or requested, the least popular or lesser used services, and the tasks that library staff find the most time consuming. Each library should tailor this assessment according to their local context and the services they provide.
4. How to track services and budget utilized

Library management must also be able to determine how to best track or maintain accurate records of the services utilized, and a detailed record of budget allocation for staff, library resources, and library services including miscellaneous expenses. Services and budget utilized by a library will help with both long and short-term planning.

5. Planning of additional financial/funding for essential services

Keeping track of the services, budget, and staff needs will help determine the areas where additional funding is crucial. On a more immediate and short-term basis it will be beneficial to appeal to local city councils, local entities, state, or federal officials for additional funding by presenting data on library services and resources offered during an emergency.

For a long-term strategy, writing to members of local, state, and federal members of government such as Congress on a consistent basis may help for permanent long term library funding. Another long-term strategy is to identify grants to apply.

6. Strategic planning of public programming

To keep both library staff morale and community morale is to continue recreational programming for the library audience either online or in person. This for example can include book clubs, story time, other creative activities suggested by library staff, etc.

In conclusion, emergency library management checklists can help assist with a faster response, better library staff support and management, and more efficient resource and allocation management.

Works Cited

http://www.ala.org/advocacy/fund-libraries


November 3, 2021
To: Urbana Free Library
From: Aleksandra Baeva baeva@illinois.edu
Re: Boosting of vaccination confidence

Almost one year has passed since the COVID vaccine was presented and the groups with high risks started to get the first shots. Now, as the CDC data tracker indicates, 58% of the total American population are fully vaccinated but specialists are worried that it is not enough to achieve herd immunity. Moreover, the new highly transmittable variants surge across the world. That’s why it is tremendously important to boost the immunization rate.

Meanwhile, the search requests about the vaccines are on the top of the google rating. Among them, not scientifically correct and deeply politicized information is still popular and continues to undermine the vaccination rollout plan jeopardizing not only the lives of unvaccinated people but even those who got a shot as well.

What is the role of a public library under these circumstances? Can librarians assist with the maintenance of vaccine trust and combat misinformation to save the lives and health of their community members at the local level? I believe that libraries have resources (physical, communicational, and social) to actively take part in boosting immunization.

Why libraries?

It is the mission of every public library to serve the community’s needs and provide trustable information. To leave behind pandemic reality with social isolation, annoying zoom meetings, economic downturn and to make the return to normal life closer the vaccination is a key stage. Health and well-being now are the topical needs for the community at this moment.

There are three simple reasons why libraries are able to take part in increasing the vaccination rate.

- they specialize in providing information
- they have experience of collaboration and connection with organizations oriented to support particular groups (for example migrants)
- they are a public space for their community
- they have the trust of the local population
- the groups with high hesitance towards vaccines are among the patrons of the public libraries

Recommendation

*How can public libraries facilitate vaccination confidence and increase the number of vaccinated people in the area?*

There are several strategies that can be deployed in the public library. Here are a few vectors with practical steps as subdivisions, and a short explanation of aims and results which are
already applied in the public libraries for boosting vaccine confidence. I do not own insider information about the Urbana Free Library, but based on the vaccination rate in Urbana (37% of Urbana-Champaign’s eligible population still did not receive the shot) I am sure that my recommendations can be of use. It is apt for the Urbana Free Library to choose the most suitable strategy according to their resources and the patron’s needs.

Collaboration with local public health departments and medical libraries

Being a bridge between institutions is a proven strategy for the solution of other issues which the library’s patrons are struggling with. Serving migrant and immigrant members of community libraries provides useful information about the resources and organizations which specialize in resolving the issues of the non-residents. Similarly, libraries can collaborate with the local public health departments and medical libraries. Here are the particular ways to do it.

- **assist patrons to make an appointment for vaccination**
  As a non-resident, I have already learned from my first-hand experience how complicated it can be to find information without an understanding of the whole bureaucratic and institutional system. Since the librarian's patrons include those who are not familiar with the US system of public health, the assistance with the navigation of the sites and registration for the shot will be extremely important for those who want to get the shot but do not know how to do it.

- **show the information about the current vaccination rate in the area.**
  Sometimes the best way to convince people to make a better decision is to show them that surrounding people (neighbors and peers) already had done it. A large proportion of community members and Americans in general already got their shots. The percentage and numbers that are shown as an infographic work more effectively than long scientific explanations and are able to dispel doubts among the hesitant public.

- **host events where the local public health experts can be asked directly by locals**
  The conversation in the comfortable and familiar environment provides the opportunity to break the institutional borders and talk with professionals as one of the members of the community.

- **serving as vaccination sites**
  Libraries have large and secure spaces at accessible locations. The collaboration with the local public departments can help to organize the site for getting a shot.

Combating misinformation and fake news

From the start of the vaccination, the anti-vaccine books were at the top of the Amazon results. Videos and other content on the Internet suggesting people not to get vaccinated were continuing to be popular until the social media giants blocked them as a last resort against the spreading misinformation and potentially harmful content. However, the public libraries are guided by the Library Bill of Rights which orders them to avoid any kind of labeling (as Twitter and YouTube can do) and censorship since the libraries are defenders of free speech. These principles raise the question, how can libraries confront the scientifically unproven and politically-charged content about vaccines. How do they bring the information to their patrons?
who experience hesitance concerning vaccination? There are multiple vectors to build confidence and help people from the community make a better choice. Some of the means were already launched by some libraries throughout the US.

- create **driven materials**, programs specifically designed to help the library to engage diverse audiences in vaccine confidence. To better understand the needs of the hesitant groups and provide inspiration for the creation of the programs serving the special needs of your community see targeted toolkits for outreach to Black¹, Hispanic², Black Faith³, Hispanic Faith⁴, and rural communities⁵.
- create a **curated booklist** about Covid, its impact, which includes the books with accessible information for children and teenagers
- find and invite vaccinated to be a **vaccination ambassador** in your community and organize the event where vaccinated members (vaccine ambassadors) share their experience. The CDC describes the strategy: “Vaccine ambassadors train community members to disseminate important health information in their communities. Derived from the lay health advisor model, ambassadors are most effective when they are trusted community members and share similar beliefs and characteristics with their peers”. As the first step staff members could become the ambassadors for their community. The training for future ambassadors can be found here [https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/vaccine/vaccine-ambassador-training-pdf.pdf](https://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/ig/vaccine/vaccine-ambassador-training-pdf.pdf)
- be ready to answer the questions from the patrons about vaccines and coronavirus.

**Possible Challenges**

The pandemic and the mass vaccination rollout is a new reality for all Americans. There are no already proven solutions with demonstrated effectiveness. That’s why discovering and inventing effective and simple mechanisms to overcome the challenges of post-pandemic reality is a task which everyone does not feel confident enough about. The problem with the lack of trained staff who are ready to serve the patrons’ current needs in time of the vaccination rollout stays pivotal.

The other, unfortunately not new challenge probably existing since the inception of the public libraries in the US is the lack of financial resources.

**Solutions**

*Sharing experience between libraries*

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¹ [https://blackcommunityvaccinetoolkit.org/](https://blackcommunityvaccinetoolkit.org/)

² [https://hispaniccommunityvaccinetoolkit.org/](https://hispaniccommunityvaccinetoolkit.org/)

³ [https://blackfaithvaccinetoolkit.org/](https://blackfaithvaccinetoolkit.org/)

⁴ [https://hispanicfaithvaccinetoolkit.org/](https://hispanicfaithvaccinetoolkit.org/)

⁵ [https://ruralvaccinetoolkit.org/](https://ruralvaccinetoolkit.org/)
Some public libraries across the USA already created their own practical strategies and programs to address hesitance about COVID-19 Vaccines and build confidence in them among their community members. For this reason, it would definitely be a missed opportunity not to share the experience between the libraries about their programs and other practical ways to reach the goal. Discussion of the flaws and advantages of already launched programs as well as presentation of the future projects will be a productive step to find the best practical decisions in line with the local environments. Despite each community being unique and hence demanding a particular program for their needs, the discussion can also help to formulate basic principles and general models of building vaccination confidence applicable to public libraries.

**Funding**

I am not going to describe the necessity of sponsorship for any non-profit initiatives for common good purposes. It is obvious that each job needs to be paid, no one does work only driven by enthusiasm. For those librarians who are searching for financial resources to install their programs or those who experience a lack of motivation, there is a Communities for Immunity project. It is a partnership of The Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the American Library Association (ALA), and the Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) provides funding for cultural institutions including libraries. The fund for each project ranges from 1,000$ to 100,000$ for a project which aims to reach the hesitant locals about the vaccine.

**Conclusion**

Public libraries are one of the most trustable sources of information and the main pillar of the local community. The library's mission is to serve the needs of the population and provide proven information. In the period of the mass vaccination, there are multiple ways for libraries to boost the population’s trust in the vaccination. Not doing this under the condition of protracted crisis would mean ignoring the needs of patrons and neglecting librarians’ responsibilities. My memo was devised to remind librarians of their vital role in the community and point out some ways they could fulfill it in time of the pandemic.

**References**


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1 The deadline for application in the second round was passed by Oct 31. However, the free webinar is available now
3. Misinformation vs. Public Health Advocacy Web Archive
4. Sye, David, Can Libraries be “Antibodies” Against the “Infodemic”? 
October 15, 2021
To: Library Students and Future Librarians
From: Nora Davies, davieseje@gmail.com
Re: Addressing Climate Change from the Library

Climate change is more than a nebulous appeal to “save nature.” Issues of our climate affect the way we live our lives: from our economy to our societal structures. There are many preparations that librarians will have to consider in order to care for their communities during the climate crisis. This memo attempts to lay a basic groundwork for library action.

Access to Information

Connecting with Information-Seekers

Global climate change is a complex issue; it’s politicized, it’s implications are stressful, it’s solutions are inconvenient, and it’s effects are generally unapparent in our day-to-day lives. The library may be able to house climate change information, but this is not enough to guarantee engagement with that information. Research in health-related information-seeking shows that people avoid information that causes them psychological stress, even when it may be useful.1

The environmental movement has long focused on appeals to personal responsibility. i.e “How Green is your Home?” While individual pro-environmental behaviors are beneficial, these appeals are less likely to change long-term habits on a wide scale. Appeals to collective responsibility for climate change are more likely to alter climate-related attitudes and behaviors.2 Furthermore, it is easier to engage people on all sides of the climate issue by focusing on what we all care about: our homes, our families, and our communities.3 When we focus our energy towards making our communities more caring and sustainable, we can create a buffer against despair and side-step hostile political debates.

Overcoming Barriers to Information Access

Academic studies and scientific data are frequently difficult to access. Because of the complexities of copyright law, much information is locked behind paywalls that make it hard for individuals without academic affiliations to access.4 This means that much of our best climate science may be inaccessible, while misinformation is free and readily available.

In addition to being scattered between private and public sources, climate information can also be highly technical and difficult for most readers to understand.5 Librarians can help bridge this

1 Choo, “Seeking and Avoiding Information in a Risky World.”
2 Obradovich and Guenther, “Collective Responsibility Amplifies Mitigation Behaviors.”
3 Bain et al., “Promoting Pro-Environmental Action in Climate Change Deniers.”
5 Tansey, “Environmental Information.”
gap. They can give patrons access to accurate scientific information by providing and promoting open or library-owned research databases. Librarians can also increase information literacy and combat misinformation by teaching patrons how to evaluate what they find on the web.1

**Making A Sustainable Library**

**Move Past “Green-Washing”**

“Green washing” describes the practice by which companies meet consumer demand for sustainable products by claiming to be sustainable but making only minimal changes to their practices.2 Like these companies, libraries need to move beyond the simple and surface-level. We need to do more than just recycling and rooftop gardens. Sustainable buildings should be considered, but they are just one piece of the sustainable library.3 Libraries also need to become sustainable with their practices and outreach.

The ALA defines sustainability in three parts: sustainable practices are socially equitable, environmentally sound, and economically feasible. Libraries need to make sure to balance all three of these needs equally when considering their policies.4 This is the only way to make our communities resilient.

**Sustainable Library Practices**

Librarians should evaluate their overall carbon emissions. This includes the carbon cost of the production and distribution of printed books and journals, the environmental effects of how we deal with excess donations, and the often-overlooked carbon toll of computer servers.5 Be knowledgeable about the corporations or other private influences that partner with your library and examine the practices of those you endorse.

In order to tackle these carbon issues, create a set of rules and values for your library. Commit to these sustainable practices so that when hard decisions arrive in the future, you will already have a groundwork laid. The sustainable library also requires sustainable outreach. Extend aid to poor and marginalized communities, as the people with the fewest resources are hit the hardest by climate disaster.

**Sustainability is a Justice Issue**

When we talk about climate change, we often only talk about the physical realties. But climate change is also a social and economic issue. People have difficulty living sustainably because the fabric of our society runs on un-sustainable practice. Individual actors alone cannot mitigate the

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1 Henk, “Tohatoha Aotearoa Commons, New Zealand, on Economy—Ecology—Equity.”
2 Dahl, “Green Washing.”
4 Smith Aldrich, “Sustainable Thinking for the Future of Libraries.”
5 Henk, “Ecology, Economy, Equity.”
effects of climate change because the world’s industry and corporations are responsible for the bulk of carbon emissions.

I would encourage librarians not to shy away from political action. Our societies need not extract profit from our environment and each other. Our natural world should not be considered as something separate from humanity. Humans are as much a part of their ecosystem as any animal. We need to pursue policy that acknowledges and values the health of our world. When we rally for labor systems free of exploitation, we are helping with climate change. When we pursue justice for the underrepresented, we are helping with climate change.

**Disaster Preparedness**

**Make a Community Plan**

We are no longer considering hypothetical disasters. Storms are becoming more common and flooding and are fires are increasing. Significant climate anomalies are only going to get worse as the planet’s temperature warms. We are now focused on limiting the extremes of these coming changes and mitigating the damages we can.

Consider the specific needs of your community: food, water, shelter, patience and care. In an emergency, people in the community will also need information. Many will have lost internet and electricity. Successful partnerships have to be in place before the disaster. Organize with sources of mutual aid ahead of time. Make a plan to preserve library materials as well, record and digitize any important materials so that they can be recovered if the library building is damaged.

**Mobilize, Organize, Support**

Community resilience is central to the public library. Libraries should do what they do best and bring people together. Coordinate public support and volunteers. If there is a need for water, call on community members with wells. The resources you have available may depend on your neighborhood. You may have whole organizations at your disposal or you may only have community members. Cultivate emergency response team training, especially in remote and rural communities.

All of that said, librarians won’t be able to do everything, nor should they. We are not social workers and we should make sure that we have connections to other qualified professionals.

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1 Niheu, “Indigenous Resistance in an Era of Climate Change Crisis.”
2 “IPCC Report.”
3 Braquet, “University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries, on Local Public Library Responses to 2005’s Hurricane Katrina.”
4 Tu-Keefner et al., “Supporting Library Staff in Emergencies and Natural Disasters.”
5 Connery, “Pottsboro (TX) Area Library, on Navigating the Big Freeze of 2021.”
6 Braquet, “University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries, on Local Public Library Responses to 2005’s Hurricane Katrina.”
Libraries need to connect with other services in the area to come up with a community plan so that they can collaborate in the event of a disaster.

**Addressing Climate Anxiety and Grief**

**Take Care of Your Library Workers**

Libraries should take care of their employees, paying fair wages and benefits at all levels of employment. Although libraries often struggle for funding, it is not sustainable to cut corners when we care for our workers. People may appear resilient, as library staff do more and more on a shoestring budget. But they can only be stretched so thin. Exhausted staff cannot perform well, nor be innovative. We need to care for our people. They are our most important resource.

It’s also important to share and provide information between libraries. Offer emergency preparedness to supplement the education of librarians and library staff.1 Staff will work best under pressure when they are well-prepared.

**Take Care of Your Emotions**

The issue of climate change can be overwhelming. It’s easy to fall into despair or burn out. Help yourself and others with actions and attitudes that foster resilience. Focus on small scale work that is achievable in your immediate community. Feeling guilty is neither healthy, nor productive.2 Resist burnout by joining in collective action. You can rest while someone else picks up the slack. Remain hopeful. Enjoy the world in which you live, the world you want to care for. Librarians should strive to be stewards for the community we serve and the world that we live on, these two things are one and the same.

**References**


Braquet, Donna. “University of Tennessee Knoxville Libraries, on Local Public Library Responses to 2005’s Hurricane Katrina.” Presented at the Fall 2021 Libraries, Literacies, Literatures minitalks series, October 1, 2021. https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_o5hamji0.


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1 Tu-Keefner et al., “Supporting Library Staff in Emergencies and Natural Disasters.”
2 Ray, A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety.


Date: 11/13/21
To: Champaign Public Library, Champaign, IL
From: Jorie Grande, jagrande1210@gmail.com
Re: Library Support of a Community in Crisis

Background

Gun violence within the Champaign, Illinois community has increased nearly 150% in the last calendar year, and as of October 31st, there have been fifteen homicides, fourteen of which were by gun. There have been 225-plus shots fired to date compared to last year’s total shot count of 189 (Rossow, 2021).

While Champaign is one of many communities in crisis right now, it is clear that present efforts to combat the violence have not been enough on their own. Champaign Mayor Deb Frank Feinen recently made a call to action regarding the particular nature of the required solution to the violence in the local news: “A complex problem requires a complex solution, and we must continue using a multi-faceted approach, including providing new economic opportunities, workforce development, and critical support for our community’s youth and families” (Kacich, 2021). Given its size and position within the community, the Champaign Public Library must be prepared and able to answer the mayor’s call.

This memo provides a number of actionable steps the library can take to better support the community, support its youth and families, and play a part in reducing and ending the violence:

- Collection development and display of topic-specific materials
- Student access and after-school programming
- Community partnerships and outreach

Collection Development and Display

The violence in Champaign, particularly the gun violence, is often cyclical. Victims frequently know their attacker, and attackers (or their families and friends) are then targeted by friends and family of the victim, or the victim themselves. As a result, even when community members are not directly involved in shootings, they tend to know who was involved and how they were involved; there are not many degrees of separation between who is personally experiencing the violence and who is witnessing it, even from afar.

According to Conley et al. (2019), “an individual can be affected by historical trauma without having been present for particular events” (p. 530). Even when these community members may not personally be experiencing violence, the events within the community itself are enough to trigger trauma responses, especially for those who have previously experienced gun violence themselves or have experienced generational trauma from gun violence.
Many of those who are affected by the violence and trauma are already from marginalized groups, and they “are in a position to significantly benefit from the free, abundant resources present in a library that they may not otherwise be able to afford or access” (Conley et al., 2019, p. 530). Collection development and display is, for this reason, important in supporting the community.

While the library is already in possession of some materials that cover topics such as trauma, violence, and processing what is happening in the community, having the books is simply not enough. This collection needs to be purposefully placed on display for ease of access so that those who need the materials most can easily find them. Presently, no such display exists within the library, and there are no plans, per the library director, to place these on display, in spite of the timeliness or need of such a display. When we can see books and videos in easy-to-find displays, we are far more likely to pick them up and engage with them.

Additional and purposeful purchasing of materials to address the social and emotional well-being of community members during times of crises will shore up the current collection and ensure it is up-to-date.

**Student Access and After-School Programming**

According to Mediavilla (2001), “the most dangerous time of day for youth is in the three hours following school” (p. 41). This is also true for the students in Champaign; in early October, a seventeen-year-old high school student was shot and killed outside an elementary school in the immediate hours after the school day had ended (Schenk, 2021).

While the schools themselves do offer programming in the form of clubs, most of these options end about an hour after the school day. And while tutoring opportunities within the school building may exist, many like the TAP In Leadership Academy have permanently shut down or require payment to enroll students. The Champaign Public Library is across the street from Edison Middle School and less than a mile from Central High School, making it an ideal and safe location for students to go after school. If students are in after-school programs or safe after-school locations while waiting for their guardians to pick them up, then they are not on the streets and they have less opportunity to perpetuate violence or become the victims of violence.

However, as of August 2021, all children under the age of fifteen are prohibited from visiting the library without an adult to supervise them (New policy for ages 15 and under, n.d.). This effectively bars all students from the nearest school from utilizing the library after school, as well as many of the youngest students at the high school. For comparison, the Leonhard Recreation Center, which is within walking distance of Jefferson Middle School and Centennial High School on the far west side of Champaign, holds open gym hours for all middle and high school students, ensuring there is a safe environment for these students after school while they wait for their guardians to pick them up (Leonhard Recreation Center, 2021).
Reopening doors to students for after-school programming and/or tutoring could help the community in keeping its youth safe, as they are, right now, the most frequent victims of the violence. If the library itself is unable to staff such programming or tutoring, it would do well to reach out to the College of Education on campus. Education students are required to complete tutoring hours to enter their programs; if they are offered the hours, they will come, they will tutor, and they won’t even need to be paid.

Students who have safe after-school plans and programming available to them are safer, more likely to succeed academically, and develop the skills needed to navigate conflicts in appropriate ways. Additionally, after-school programming helps “develop relationships between youth and caring adults, as well as building partnerships with families, schools, and communities” (Mediavilla, 2001, p. 41). A core value of the library is to build these partnerships and support the community, and they can better do so with appropriate programming.

**Community Partnerships and Outreach**

The library and its staff cannot be expected to individually and personally solve all programming needs for a community in crisis. However, through community partnerships, the library can open its doors for other groups trained in the appropriate services to fulfill this role for community members.

When asked, the library director provided the same answer as the library’s website on whether or not they were partnered with community organizations and groups to combat the violence in Champaign: there are partnerships, but none were specifically named other than the Champaign County Community Coalition (Mission, n.d.).

The Community Coalition is a large, and continually growing, organization dedicated to improving the lives of youth and families (About Us, n.d.). The Champaign Public Library previously hosted the Community Coalition’s meetings until the organization outgrew the library’s space. This, however, does not account for the programming or initiatives that the Community Coalition runs. Programming and trainings through the CU Trauma and Resiliency Initiative (CU TRI), a branch of the Community Coalition, are meant for interested community members and could easily take place in meeting spaces within the library for a wider audience. Programming through CU TRI would include opportunities for community members to learn how to support survivors of violence and trauma, build resiliency, and prevent adverse community experiences (CU Trauma and Resiliency Initiative, n.d.).

Additional resources are available through the University of Illinois. Education students can be tapped for tutoring. Social work students require clock hours for many of their courses, and the public library would provide ease of access to a number of community members experiencing trauma and violence.

Community outreach would greatly help the library advertise the materials, programming, and services available to community members during this time. Existing community partners, like
the Community Coalition, will be able to advertise the library’s further services and programming to the community through their meetings and website. By partnering with Champaign Unit 4 Schools, the library would be able to reach thousands of students and their families, ensuring family and youth-centered materials and resources on processing trauma are advertised to the appropriate community members. Outreach should even extend to the local churches in the community, as that is another partnership that could ensure programming and resources are advertised to the members of the community who likely need it most. Because of historic discrimination and trauma, especially in the Black community of Champaign, many do not actively reach out for help themselves, but they will take the advice and recommendations from church leaders and local community healers (Conley et al., 2019, p. 530).

Conclusions

Champaign is a community in crisis, and, presently, the Champaign Public Library is not taking many of the steps it could be taking to support community healing and safety. Action steps recommended include:

- Continue collection development to include up-to-date materials on trauma, grief, violence, and the healing process to better support those affected directly and tangentially by the violence.
- Create easily accessible displays of these materials so that the community members who need them most can find them quickly and efficiently.
- Widen student access to after-school programming and tutoring in order to provide safe options so that students are not left vulnerable to continued violence once they leave the school.
- Deepen the community partnerships already in existence and continue to provide space for the programming and healing opportunities supported by those partners.
- Utilize community partnerships to develop outreach plans to better advertise the library’s resources for those facing or surviving violence.

As Mayor Deb Frank Feinen said in a local interview, “In the end, it will take the entire Champaign-Urbana community working together to stop the violence” (Kacich, 2021). It is up to the Champaign Public Library to answer this call to action and create further opportunities for healing and support for the Champaign community in its time of crisis.

References


Over the past few years, misinformation, particularly via social media, has been an increasingly serious issue. Easily disproven content spreads virally, shared and reshared by unsuspecting social media users. The term “fake news” also has entered the public lexicon, often used in conflicting ways.

This memo summarizes some of the recent research into this issue, describing how this phenomenon arose, the risks it poses to society, and practical actions that public librarians can take to educate their users and help to protect them from the scourge of misinformation and fake news.

What is “fake news” and how does social media play into it?

The term can have many definitions, but generally it represents a broad landscape of false or warped information, either intentional (i.e., disinformation) or unintentional (i.e., misinformation). It can take the form of viral social media posts made to look like news reports, or news reports that are verifiably false and intend to mislead (De Paor and Heravi 2020). Unlike satire news like The Onion, fake news is not intended for comedy, but for deception (Alvarez 2016).

The rise of fake news correlates with the rapid rise of social media usage. Per a 2016 Pew Research Center study:

- 79% of all Internet users use Facebook.
- 76% of those users log onto Facebook at least daily.
- 55% of Facebook users log on several times per day.
- Half of those users also use more than one social media platform, such as Instagram or Twitter (Alvarez 2016).

Another Pew study found that 62% of adults report getting their news from social media, rather than the newspaper or the TV nightly news (Alvarez 2016).

Social media users are particularly susceptible to fake news for the following reasons:

- **Information overload:** The Internet provides countless unregulated outlets via which anyone can disseminate their ideas, leading to a tsunami of information that is virtually impossible for the human brain to process. As a result, users tend to gravitate towards information that reaffirms preexisting beliefs rather than attempt the difficult cognitive task of determining the truth (De Paor and Heravi 2020).
• **Ease of creating manipulative digital content**: For bad actors taking advantage of those unregulated outlets, it is also increasingly easy and inexpensive to produce realistic news-like content and fake videos that sometimes can fool even experts (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

• **Influence of newsfeeds and algorithms**: Social media is designed to exploit the sharing of content that reinforces the user’s worldview or elicits an emotional reaction. A newsfeed algorithm (e.g., Facebook) pushes information to the user that it “knows” (via behavior tracking) the user would like, but that may not be truthful or vetted. Newsfeed content about politics or current events therefore is not intended to inform, but instead perpetuates existing beliefs. Additionally, algorithms prioritize controversial topics that generate views (i.e., revenue) and so tend to heavily promote misinformation that generates a lot of user activity, even despite interventions by the social media companies to suppress that misinformation (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

• **Lack of trust in traditional media**: In recent years there has been a growing distrust of the media, sparked by a general skepticism of “the establishment” (De Paor and Heravi 2020) and encouraged by “corrupt media” narratives posed by Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign (Alvarez 2016). This causes people to turn to “underground” (i.e., fake) news sources, which in turn reinforce distrust of the mainstream media with claims of corruption and lies on the part of the latter (Alvarez 2016). As a result, “people who rely on social media as their primary or sole pathway to news are far more misinformed—and oddly unconcerned about being misinformed—than those who rely on print media, network television, or news apps” (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

**What is the impact?**

This proliferation of fake news has serious consequences for our society, including:

• **The creation of “information bubbles”**: When newsfeeds only display to users content that they “like,” it leads to confirmation bias, in which people seek out only information that reaffirms their existing views (De Paor and Heravi 2020). Eventually, people develop a self-serving skepticism in which they just deny any information they do not like (Batchelor 2017).

• **Risks to democracy**: These information bubbles and denials of facts pose serious risks to democracy, for which a well-informed electorate is essential (Bachelor 2017). Many state, corporate, political, and individual actors are harnessing the power of misinformation to further their agendas, forming “the greatest threat that democracy has faced since the end of World War II” (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

• **Other personal and societal harm**: Beyond politics, misinformation also has had a grave impact on the COVID-19 pandemic and current social justice issues. The pandemic has been exacerbated, and millions have suffered health-wise, due to bad actors and
misinformed individuals using social media to spread harmful, false claims related to the virus. Additionally, in response to the social justice protests across the U.S. in 2020, many actors spread large amounts of misinformation online, including lies about the actions of both police and protesters, in an effort to antagonize and promote violence (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

What can librarians do?

Even with the lack of trust in the institution of the media, the public still trusts their community libraries, with 77% of Americans believing that libraries are essential to providing resources they can trust (De Paor and Heravi 2020). Therefore, public libraries have a duty as well as an opportunity to help their users resist the influence of fake news.

Many researchers agree that the single most important strategy in combating misinformation is educating users in information literacy, which is defined as “[being] able to recognize when information is needed and [having] the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association 2006).

The literature suggests the following strategies that librarians can use for educating their users in information literacy:

- Use, and recommend use of, fact-checking resources like FactCheck, Politifact, Snopes, and Washington Post Factchecker (Batchelor 2017).

- Develop and/or provide information literacy quick guides, like the “CRAAP Test,” which stands for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy and purpose (Meriam Library 2010).

- Provide extended training courses and workshops for patrons. Examples include:
  - Dallas Public Library’s collaboration with local journalists on an eight-week journalism course for students that addressed information literacy.
  - Oakland Public Library traveling to schools and community organizations to present interactive workshops on identifying fake news (De Paor and Heravi 2020).

- Provide ongoing information literacy education. Information literacy skills are not static, but need to be continually cultivated. As such, libraries should frequently reinforce these skills by incorporating information literacy into all their library programs (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

- Ensure that a wide variety of credible news sources from both ends of the political spectrum are available in the collection for patrons to access (De Paor and Heravi 2020).

- Provide a safe space for difficult conversations. A public library is an inclusive space where all are welcome: people can gather there to forge connections, have their voices
heard, and perhaps not feel so inclined to seek validation through news sources on the Internet (Alvarez 2016, De Paor and Heravi 2020).

- **Collaborate with community organizations and leaders** and advocate to policymakers, business leaders and other citizens in support of the library’s vital role in this effort (De Paor and Heravi 2020).

Beyond direct interactions with the community, there are additional steps that the library profession can take in its battle against misinformation:

- **Stay informed** on recent developments in misinformation and fake news through resources like the ALA Intellectual Freedom Blog, Storyful, and the Trust Project (Batchelor 2017).

- **Diversify the field**, as a more diverse library profession will better understand the information literacy needs of their communities (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

- **Revisit library values** regarding ethics, regulation, and censorship. The profession’s traditional resistance to regulation and censorship may need to be reconsidered in the face of the growing need to protect communities from misinformation (De Paor and Heravi 2020).

- **Don’t avoid politics.** While the profession traditionally has strived for political neutrality, an important aspect of information literacy is helping users understand that the content they see can be politically motivated, as can the content creators and services through which they view the content (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

- **Promote information literacy education among library professionals themselves**, as “we cannot take for granted that being employed as a librarian is a guarantee that one is information literate” (Jaeger and Taylor 2021).

The battle against misinformation likely will not abate anytime soon, as the political stakes in manipulating the public continue to rise and the technology used to create and spread false content continues to mature. Public librarians have a uniquely powerful position in this fight, and it is urgent that the profession utilizes the strategies detailed above to protect its communities from misinformation as much as possible.

**References**


The following is a primer on diversity in youth collections and diversity audits. This document provides resources and talking points to be used as part of collection development and library messaging.

In light of the ongoing conversations about representation and diversity, it is important as a library to positively contribute to that discussion. Libraries have been institutions of the mainstream for too long, and are now poised to provide necessary and enlightening information to their communities. Our own community has shown itself to be both excited about promoting diversity and hesitant to welcome minority groups. With that in mind, it is our job to ensure that our collections reflect both the community and the world at large. To begin, the library can take several steps to assess the current status of our collections and create a plan for how we will diversify those collections.

Diversity is necessary in libraries, especially in youth collections. Children benefit from seeing themselves represented. Seeing other people fairly represented also helps promote open discussion and connection between groups (Wood, 2021). Youth collections have enormous potential to influence children as they grow up, and thus play a part in the ongoing creation of a more welcoming and positive society. These books often become part of our shared culture, so those books deserve careful consideration. We have a unique position that we can leverage to encourage children to learn about the world around them with an open mind.

Librarians have a variety of tools available when conducting a diversity audit. Some organizations exist to provide these tools, allowing users to import lists and run a report. These tools are often used at an institutional level, and therefore need to be adopted by the whole library to be fully utilized. The Northbrook Public Library needs to commit, as a whole entity, to the promotion of diverse collections. Youth Services, with its variety of smaller collections, can test out these tools and develop procedures and documentation before rolling out those tools to the rest of the library.

Diversity Audit Tools

- **Diverse BookFinder Collection Analysis Tool**
  - This tool allows users to upload files containing titles and ISBNs to run a report against Diverse BookFinder’s own collection. Use of the tool requires an approved account but does not cost money. The analysis tool should be used in combination with the database to find new books to add to the collection after auditing.
- **Booklist & Collection Analysis Tools**
This tool allows users to import titles and run a report to see a variety of statistics, including diversity. The website also includes other features to help young readers as well as library professionals find new books. This is more of a full system, instead of just a single tool, and would require more significant investment to implement. It can be purchased on a yearly basis.

If those services are unavailable or out of a library's price range, then a manual audit can be conducted. This would involve checking different lists that highlight popular diverse books and comparing those lists to the collection. It may also be necessary to identify books not on those lists, to get a more complete picture. Manual auditing methods might include additional research into authors and other creators, which can be a complicated task (Mortensen, 2019). Research can also involve actively searching for book controversies to make sure that librarians are up to date and aware of ongoing conversations, and potentially avoiding books that have had major issues (Mortensen, 2019).

This process can be time-consuming and provide diminishing returns as it gets more granular. Because of that, it is important to balance staff time and possibly focus on current and future purchasing guided by a more general audit. Additionally, auditing the collection will surface books that contain problematic or harmful content. These books will require careful assessment and might have to be removed (Boudrye, 2021). This can be complicated further by authors who have displayed racist, homophobic, or transphobic behavior, among other troubling indicators (Boudrye, 2021). Ongoing discussions about the role of the author and the value of intent have not discovered any easy solutions. At the very least, we can choose to keep those books in the collection but not promote them. A more drastic move would be removing those books, which may be required in some cases. Of course, proper consideration is necessary to avoid censorship. The goal of this audit is to promote diversity. This is not an exact science, and that may be uncomfortable, but we need to have these conversations so that we can best serve the community.

The current state of publishing contributes to this issue. Children’s books are becoming more diverse, but started from such a low point that the progress that has been made is certainly not enough. A statistical study by Cooperative Children’s Book Center reveals that white characters still dominate half of published books (Dahlen & Huyck, 2020). Even more concerning, animals and other non-human characters are represented more often than any non-white character. This is particularly discouraging, as libraries can only really include books that have been published. Publishers are naturally going to be more interested in what makes money instead of what is best for children. Research has already shown that children learn more from human characters than non-human characters (Larsen, 2018). It is for those reasons that it is important to support and promote authors from diverse backgrounds who are sharing their lived experiences. Selectors should be aware of this and use the resources below to seek out diverse books to be added to the collection.

Resources

- We Need Diverse Books: Where can you find diverse books?
○ We Need Diverse Books is an organization that promotes diverse books for children. WNDB supports librarians and teachers by providing lists and resources, and supports authors and illustrators with grants and promotion. This page highlights different lists and awards that promote diversity as well as independent bookstores. Importantly, this page does not only include awards, but also other organizations that aggregate books representing different identities. When selecting for the collection, this can help expand beyond just awarded books.

- **ALA/ALSC: Awards by Other Organizations**
  ○ ALA/ALSC has listed major book awards given by other organizations. Many of these organizations award books specifically for their representation of different groups. This page aggregates awards given by ALA-associated organizations, ALA-affiliated organizations, and other unaffiliated organizations. This can help guide selectors when promoting awarded books or creating book lists.

- **Diverse BookFinder**
  ○ Diverse BookFinder specializes in collecting diverse books. The website includes a searchable catalog that specifically includes books that contain diverse representation. The search feature also allows searching by award, ethnicity, genre, gender, and more. Diverse BookFinder also curates lists and highlights quality books on their blog. The general database does not screen for quality.

- **Own Voices Books LibGuide**
  ○ This guide collects Own Voices books, separated by identity. It is important to highlight Own Voices writing, so that books represent true, lived experiences. This also helps promote authors with diverse backgrounds who have traditionally been at a disadvantage in the publishing industry. It is not comprehensive, but provides plenty of options when looking for books to add to the collection.

It is worth noting that as new materials make their way to the shelves, the community will respond in more than one way. Previous initiatives have already prompted questions and pushback. Please direct questions and complaints to your manager and refer patrons to the collection development policy on our website. Patrons asking for more information can also be directed to the resources on this document.

It is therefore my recommendation that the Northbrook Public Library purchase a diversity audit tool and conduct an audit of each collection in Youth Services. These changes will refresh our collections and help us better serve our patrons. Considering the Northbrook Public Library’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion goals and present initiatives, the Diverse BookFinder tool is likely the best option. Additionally, Youth Services should use the above resources to guide purchasing and reader’s advisory. The library as a whole should make sure the collection development policy is up to date, and have talking points prepared for patron questions. These steps will update the collection and promote circulation of new, diverse titles.
References


Date: October 9, 2021
To: Youth Services Librarians in the Greater Chicagoland Area
From: Dana Fanslow, Youth Services Manager, Fox River Grove Memorial Library, dfanslow@frgml.org
Re: Why and how to do a diversity audit of youth materials

What if you never saw someone like you in anything you read? What if every character looked and acted the same? "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Bishop, 1990). Every voice matters. No child should ever feel as though they are alone in the world, or shame on who they are; instead, uniqueness should be embraced and rejoiced. How do we as youth librarians even start to tackle such an issue? The simple answer is to offer our patrons a variety of diverse books that include diverse characters, that were written and illustrated by people of every sector of our society. If you read that statement and chuckled slightly, you understand it is not that easy. Creating a diverse collection has a lot of moving parts, some of which will be out of your control, but ultimately your hard work and dedication to such a worthy endeavor will create a ripple effect for future generations that includes tolerance, understanding, and empathy.

Merriam-Webster defines diversity as the inclusion of people of different races, cultures, etc. But Tananarive Due says “‘Diversity’ should just be called ‘reality.’” Your books, your TV shows, your movies, your articles, your curricula, need to reflect reality” (Ensuring books reflect ‘reality’ 2021). The sad truth is though children’s books do not come close to emulating the real world when most of the stories are about white characters. Cooperative Children’s Book Center examined the main characters in children’s literature and found that 41.8% were white, 29.2% were animal/other, 11.9% were black/African, 8.7% were Asian/Asian American, 5.3% were Latinx, 3.4% were disabled, 3.1% were LGBTQ+, 1% were native/first nations, and .05% Pacific Islander (Herndon).

The world we live in is not close to being that one dimensional; if it were a painting, it would be a beautiful messy rainbow of color. Our literary collections should reflect that, where we could not only learn more about ourselves but others as well. Rudine Sims Bishop idea of “Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors” has become a staple in
describing children’s literature. This concept allows us to fully comprehend the power of books. “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (Bishop, 1990). Finding yourself in a book is powerful; it affirms you are not alone and that you have value. And ultimately it is through those window and sliding glass door moments that we learn to understand and appreciate others.

Coming to terms, per say, with the disparity of diverse characters in children’s books is the first step to creating a more inclusive collection. The next step is the most labor-intensive part: creating a diversity audit on your materials. A diversity audit is where you take inventory of your collection, and are able to use that data to better develop more specific areas (Jenson). There are many different ways to complete your audit, you can take a sampling of random sections or audit your entire collection; as well as what information you are looking for can be as simple as just looking at main characters to looking at authors and illustrators as well.

After taking the initial step in deciding to actively create a more inclusive collection, you need to decide on your categories. Meaning you need to decide what types of diversity you want to account for in your audit (Bogan, 2020). I suggest using the tool https://diversebookfinder.org/ for picture book specific audits, or for those just wanting to get a sampling on how their collection is fairing. This free tool is for picture books which the user can upload ISBNs into the bookfinder data base. Then the user can filter their results using several facets: race/culture, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, immigration, gender, awards, religion, settings, content, and genre (Elrod & Kester). If you decide to use this tool a few things to be aware of: it does not give you the author/illustrator information; it only includes picture books; and it does not include all picture books.

I, personally, chose to do a more extensive audit where I have thirty-seven different categories. (My personal audit format is pictured below.) I chose to use an excel spreadsheet to allow me to see each category. Something I also considered was how I was going to present to the board yearly and excel made the most sense. This current audit is a second-generation project, when I started 2 years ago my audit was formatted completely different. We began this particular format in August of 2021, and I believe will allow us to better access the information we are looking for.
I have personally committed to decolonizing my library collection, that is not just picture books, but easy readers, graphic novels, junior fiction, J DVD and Young Adult. My entire team has embraced this mission, which is key. Changing a collection has to be a team effort: this includes collection development, what to weed, displays, and programming. I figured that no matter how intensive your audit is, you still need to examine every book individually, so why not put every category in that I really want to look for. When I was just starting out, I received the best advise from my fellow librarians’, when looking at each book spend a maximum of five minutes for each one: that included flipping through the pages, as well as researching the author and illustrator.

Here is what I chose for my audit.

**Essentials**
- Title
- Barcode (easier for me to search if we need to update or weed the information)
- Call Number
- Type of material

**Author and Illustrator**
- White, cis, straight, nondisabled, neurotypical male
- White, cis, straight, nondisabled, neurotypical female
- Diverse (something other than white, cis, straight, nondisabled, neurotypical)
  - Why
  - How do they identify themselves: male, female, nonbinary

**Characters**
- Initial Identity Markers
  - White, Animal/Nonhuman, African American/Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Biracial/Unspecified BIPOC, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, Asian (broken up by region of Asia)
- Additional Identity markers
Inclusive

- Does this book have an overall inclusive theme?

When you complete your audit, you now have the ability to have a nonbiased perspective of what your collection looks like. View this as just a jumping off point. For myself and my Youth Service staff, we knew how to adjust our ordering and weeding. It is also important to know that there is no instant fix, this is a long-term shift in collection development.

Fox River Grove Memorial Library Diversity Findings for 2020 and 2021
References


TO: Public Libraries of America
FROM: Aaron Khan, aaronk9@illinois.edu
Subject: Combating the Whiteness that permeates the public library system

The Purpose of the Public Library, and How African American’s Can Gain True and Equal Access

“The significance of the public library to its user will generally be demonstrated by the facilities which it offers him.” This statement has held true in reference to white Americans’, however, the same can’t be said for African American citizens and other people of color. The modern American library finds its origins through Andrew Carnegie when he built his first “free for all” library in Atlanta in 1902. The Carnegie Library of Atlanta though was not truly “free for all.” The African American citizens’ of Atlanta who paid taxes to fund the operation of this library were not allowed to use its facilities. The backlash to this decision was immediate. W.E.B Du Bois, then a professor of sociology at Atlanta University, pushed for the Atlanta Carnegie Library board to make the library free and equal. He was much to his chagrin met with the statement: “Negroes would not be permitted to use the Carnegie Library in Atlanta.” This attitude, that African Americans do not belong in libraries, a place of learning and community, which then as it does now permeate society in a variety of library systems.

Libraries are meant to be sites of safety, wonder, of philanthropy, and often signify a rite of passage for many children, both black and white. Libraries are the site of many people’s first foray into the adult world and the first time they could explore the world as they saw fit. In the spring of 1938 at nine years old, Martin Luther King Jr. experienced, to a degree the sense of wonder that other white children were able to freely experience. A young child in just the third or fourth grade, MLK was not allowed to check out the books he desired about Gandhi. However as, Auburn Avenue Branch librarian, Annie L. McPheeters “said with a wink” if he were to bring in his father’s library card, she would allow him to take these books home. McPheeters was not the first and certainly not the last librarian white or black to bend racist or in young MLK’s situation America’s racist policies that prevented African Americans from gaining proper access to a library. The Auburn Avenue Branch Library was the city’s response to W.E.B du Bois and the African American community’s push for access to a library. The Auburn Avenue Library, despite the fact, that it did provide some level of access to a library even with its rundown and off-cast materials, was not truly equal. It would not be equal until African Americans’ had access to the quality public libraries that white American’s have never had to fight for.

Suggestions to Decenter Whiteness in the Library

In the systemic whiteness that is seen throughout the library public system, how can public librarians ensure that African Americans and other minorities achieve truly free and equal access to libraries? The most effective solution for public libraries to best achieve this goal is to decenter whiteness throughout the library as discussed in Fiona Blackburn’s article
The Intersection between Cultural Competence and Whiteness in Libraries. To decenter whiteness in the library, Australian librarian Fiona Blackburn suggests that white librarians learn cultural competence. This meant engaging with one’s community in a way that is beneficial to them rather than one that is beneficial to the library and librarian. In simple terms, organize the library around the community and not the librarian. This is to make the library a place where people of color see themselves represented.

In the following quote we prominently see how whiteness has permeated the library:

You know I am really going to have to think this through. The whiteness of a library as a place to learn how to fit in. I never considered it that. I loved to read and that is the place to find books. At the same time, one learns English – to read and write – which is part of education and educating in the ‘white’ way which is at the foundation of libraries.

What librarians should take away from this quotation, if not the most important facet of this memo, is that we need to make libraries a place where whiteness is no longer the norm. The identities of marginalized people should no longer be seen as “otherness.” As is quoted in the article “A New Vocabulary for Inclusive Librarianship: Applying Whiteness Theory to Our Profession,” written by Isabel Espinal: “unless we address whiteness, unless we identify and name it, many of the problems that plague us collectively and as individual librarians of color will continue.” Fiona Blackburn has done an excellent job at addressing whiteness, identifying the ways it is present in the library system and has come up with a way to combat the problems that have permeated the public library system for years. Her idea to utilize cultural competence is the first and biggest step needed to combat whiteness in the library. Direct and deliberate action in combination with cultural competence is needed but we can not accomplish these goals alone.

To simply state that a library is dedicated to free and equal access for African Americans and other people of color is not enough. Deliberate and intentional actions are needed to affect actual change in our public library system. One form that this deliberate and intentional action has taken in the past are the Freedom Libraries, discussed in Mike Selby’s monograph Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South. Through modernization of the Freedom Library and the decentering of whiteness throughout the library system bias against African Americans and other minority groups will be eliminated. Freedom libraries were created for African American people by themselves and other white civil rights activists using what Fiona Blackburn calls cultural competence. They listened to the community they wanted to serve and organized themselves around it.

The Origins of the Public Library

The American public library system began on October 14th, 1852, when City Document 37 was ratified in Boston, Massachusetts. This document caused multiple public library systems to emerge around the country. The first libraries to emerge around the country were created for the white poor, foreign-born, and everyday citizen but not the African American. African Americans’ were never intended to have access to the public library. This means that the
Freedom libraries grew out of African Americans’ response to being unable to use the superior public libraries available to white citizens.

The Freedom Libraries, themselves, were like traditional libraries in the sense that they were collections of books and other resources available for African Americans to peruse and learn from without consequence. These libraries, however, were far from traditional. African Americans’ were not allowed to use the same libraries and were relegated to their run-down versions of what was offered to white Americans and this was used to their advantage even though many were against the idea. Freedom Libraries were created in white activists’ homes and in any building that they could manage to rent. If they were not allowed to use the same libraries as white Americans’, they would make their own and that is exactly what happened in the many Freedom Libraries that emerged around the country.

At the Hattiesburg Freedom Library, they made sure that content made by and for African Americans was gathered in their collection. At the Greenville Freedom Library in Mississippi, they reclassified how books were sorted in their collections because they realized that traditional cataloging categories were not applicable to many African American citizens. As a result of African Americans’ long history of being denied access to libraries, it was realized that children’s books may not always be for children. With this information in mind, I propose that modern-day Freedom Libraries, in some form, are reinstated. In this day and age, when African Americans’ are free to use whatever library they wish, Freedom Libraries in the form they originated are no longer necessary. Freedom Libraries in the modern-day should be created inside the library utilizing the factors discussed below.

**Policy Suggestions Revisited**

To combat white in America’s public library system librarians should decenter whiteness. This is done through continual learning on the part of the white librarian. Continual learning, if correctly done will bring people of color’s perspective to the forefront in libraries and finally begin to represent them and the intricacies of their lives. Libraries would possibly for the first time be a place for African Americans. To make sure that this happens, the white librarian should:

1. Learn cultural competence- listen to the community you serve
2. Continue to Learn
3. Try your best to not get defensive when people of color have concerns
4. Organize the library around the community, not the librarian
5. “Stop talking and start doing”
6. Modernize the Freedom Library
7. Most important of all: Whiteness should no longer be the default

**Suggested Readings**
http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/culturalcompetence/.

Espinal, Isabel, Tonia Sutherland, and Charlotte Roh. “A Holistic Approach to Inclusive
Librarianship: Decentering Whiteness in Our Profession.” Library Trends Volume 67,
Number 1, Summer 2018, pp. 147-162. Johns Hopkins University Press.
https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/101941/Espinal_Sutherland%26Roh.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.


October 19, 2021
To: iSchool Diversity Committee
From: Kate Williams
Re: Representation of marginalized or minoritized people in our courses: Findings and proposals

In Spring 2021 the MSLIS program committee voted to eliminate a requirement that MSLIS/MS African Studies students take the course Bibliography of Africa, while acknowledging that 1) the move would lower enrollment and 2) no one person was overseeing that joint degree. The committee also decided that in Fall 2021 it would review our course offerings for representation of marginalized people. This is a contribution to that task.

The US is already a “majority-minority” country when we count under-18s. By 2040 we will be a completely majority-minority country. The professions we educate for are sorely undiverse and our committee is charged with guiding the school to face this situation and change.

**FINDINGS**: A total of eleven ischool courses out of 243, or 4.5%, listed below, use any of the following words in the title: Afr*, Spanish, Asia*, Underserved, Underrepresented, Marginalized, Race, Ethnicity, Divers*, Immig*, or Justice. The words Black, Latin*, Hispanic, Native America* were not found. The list searched is at https://ischool.illinois.edu/degrees-programs/courses, and Summer 2021, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 were also examined via https://courses.illinois.edu/.

1. IS 451 Bibliography of Africa
2. Advanced Topics 563 SS - Library Resources for Spanish Speakers
3. Topics 491 Asian American Youth Literature
4. IS 308 Race, Gender, and Information Technology
5. Special Topics 390 RDS - Race & Digital Studies
6. Special Topics 390 RGS - Race, Gender, Sex in Comics
7. Special Topics 590 RGS - Race, Gender, Sexuality Information Professions
8. IS 540 Social Justice in the Information Professions
9. Advanced Topics 563 SJ - Social Justice in Youth Literature
10. Advanced Topics 571 Immigration and Information Behavior
11. Advanced Topics 571 Information Services to Diverse Users

Five courses use at least one of these words in the description:

12. IS 381 Introduction to Literacies for Youth
PROPOSAL #1: Reinstate the MSLIS/MS African Studies joint degree requirement for Bibliography of Africa, offer it annually, and identify a coordinator for this degree. While the Bibliography of Africa requirement was dropped, the MSLIS/MS Slavic Studies still requires the course IS 461 Russian, East European, and Eurasian Bibliography & Research Methods. What’s more, last year the Bib of Africa instructor (UIUC’S Africa subject specialist librarian) was not informed why his course was cancelled, when at the same time the history department was asking him if they could send their students into the course.

PROPOSAL #2: Add two courses, one on African American bibliography/knowledge systems and resources and the other on Native American bibliography/knowledge systems and resources, and offer them annually. These two groups are certainly in the front row when it comes to marginalization in the US and in our professions. What is more, in the current course offerings, representation of marginalized or minoritized people is very slight and dominated by course titles using the word race. This descriptor looks at people from the outside, not from inside their cultures. It minimizes agency. And after all, cultural competency (knowledge about marginalized cultures) and educating/graduating/hiring/retaining people from marginalized groups are the two overarching strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

PROPOSAL #3: Ask our faculty to send us their current or recent syllabi so we can extend our search for diversity in our courses. This analysis examines the most available information: course titles, descriptions, and semesters offered. Course syllabi and readings would tell us even more, but are not widely available. With the syllabi we get, we can do further analysis as well as let the school know what we are seeking.

CLOSING QUESTION: The larger question underpinning this analysis is: To what extent is the social or cultural, as opposed to the technological/engineering/science, covered in our curriculum? Is information science/information studies/informatics/librarianship just an extension of computer science? To what extent does our curriculum draw on the social sciences, history, literatures and languages, or professions like social work or education? (Many of them have retired the concept of race, for instance.) To what extent do we link with these disciplines for our program offerings, or are we only leaning towards north of Green Street? Diversity itself is rooted to the south.

Diversity is measured in the school’s faculty, staff, students, teaching, research, service, and even our spaces. I hope we can develop and put forward proposals in all these areas.

See next page for table of frequency of course offerings.
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For comparison purposes: IS 461 Russian, East European, and Eurasian Bibliography & Research Methods
The world around us is constantly shifting and changing. It is time that the Genoa Public Library shifts and changes with it. As a public Library we see many kinds of patrons walk through our front door. It is our duty to make them all feel welcome and invited into the space. Below I have outlined a few key demographics that could easily be improved upon. This is in no way a slight to anyone, but there is always room for improvement.

**Gender & Pronouns**

It is important not to make assumptions about an individual’s pronouns or gender. Below are a few ideas of how to make the Library a more welcoming space for patrons who are Trans.

**When someone walks into the building that you’ve never met, go for a neutral greeting.**

“Hello” or if it’s a group of people “Hi Folks”. It might feel ‘uncomfortable’ to do this, but society has been conditioned to think that using “sir” and “ma’am” is polite when it may be harmful to someone. As midwesterners it’s easy to say “Hey Guys”, but that is also harmful because it is specific to one gender.

**When patrons apply for a library card**

When patrons apply for a Library card it is customary to ask for a photo ID and use the name on the ID. Some patrons have yet to change their name on their ID or were told that they couldn’t change their name. Therefore, we should be asking patrons their preferred name (Currier and White). Another way to allow patrons to change their name in our system is to have a form on the Library website to request a name change. Having a form will allow the patron to feel more comfortable requesting a name change and save them anxiety. Currently, there is not a spot on the patron account form to put preferred pronouns. This could be rectified by contacting PrairieCat to request a field be added for preferred pronouns or adding a note to the file of the patron where it is easily viewable.

**Bathrooms**

The long term goal would be to convert both bathrooms to gender neutral restrooms. In the meantime we could do two things: add a restroom sign above the restrooms so patrons wouldn’t have to search the Library for them and if a patron asked where the bathrooms where instead of being specific “the mens restroom is on the left” instead try saying “the bathrooms are located on either side of the Exit sign”.

It’s okay to get it wrong sometimes. Slip ups will more than likely happen. What is important is to correct yourself and move on. If someone corrects you, do not get mad. Adjust and continue on. Correcting yourself is not a sign of failure, it is a sign that you are willing to learn.
Children & Guardians
Similar to Gender and Pronouns, it is best to never assume anyone’s relation to the child that they are with. Families can have a diverse makeup and no family looks the same. We are not privy to personal information about our patrons, as we shouldn’t be, therefore we don’t know if a child is living with a grandparent, in a foster situation, is adopted, or staying with family friends. When addressing a child and their guardian try using terms like; adult, caregiver, or grown-up.

Teens
Teens are often overlooked. There isn’t a lot of programming for them. It’s hard to attract them to the Library and librarians tend to give up. “In the United States, public libraries have long treated teenagers as a distinct service group, separate from both children’s and adult’s services” (Ornstein and Reid). The Genoa Public Library may not be a welcoming enough space for teens to feel like they can come in. There isn’t a space for them to hang out that is all their own. Most programs at the Library are geared toward adults and children. Below are some ways to improve our Teen Services.

Talking to Teens
Teens are in that unique position of not yet being adults and still considered a child when they do not want to be treated as such. They crave independence, but still need guidance. When teens act up in the Library, tell them to come back and try again. Always provide an option instead of a rule (Ornstein and Reid). Give them a chance and you may be surprised with their behavior change. Let them know that the behavior is not acceptable for the Library. They don’t need to be monitored as closely as young children. Many believe that teens are up to no good, but many are simply trying to figure out who they are. It’s a difficult time and it should be met with grace. Talk to teens like they are individuals that matter. Don’t talk down to them. If a group of teens is getting too rowdy try directing them to a craft (Ornstein and Reid) or focusing their energy elsewhere. Treat teens as if they were any other patron.

Teen Space
The Genoa Public Library is a small Library and does not have enough space to accommodate a full scale Teen Space. With the space that we do have we can carve out an area designated to teens. There is a small corner that is currently occupied by two tables and two chairs. Converting that space into a teens only area would help make them feel as if it’s their own. Adding a few comfy chairs or a couch to the space will offset it from the rest of the Library. Children have their own area with toys and seating and the adults have the rest of the Library.

Patrons with Disabilities
There are many considerations for better accessibility in the Library. It is important to be patient and to treat patrons with disabilities as an individual. You may need to practice
patience. It is important to remember that there may be “invisible disabilities” that we cannot see.

**Patrons who have sensory issues**

Have items at the front desk to help them, noise cancelling headphones, emotion cards, fidget toys (2021 ILA Annual Conference Virtual Portal). We could also provide a time for patrons with sensory issues to come into the Library when it is quiet and we could turn off some of the lights so the environment is not as overstimulating. We wouldn’t have to shut the Library, but we could make sure all patrons are aware of the quiet hours.

**Patrons in wheelchairs**

Make sure there is enough room for them to maneuver around the Library. Space out tables and chairs. Make sure furniture isn’t on top of each other and make sure that there are stations that those with disabilities can access to check out materials.

There are other accessibility considerations such as those that are visually impaired or hard of hearing. These patrons may require additional accommodations to communicate but it is important to treat them like all other patrons.

**Helping a Patron Who Doesn’t Speak English**

This is difficult as all employees at the Genoa Public Library only know how to speak English, but learning a few key phrases in languages that our patrons speak will be helpful. If someone doesn’t speak English, do not talk down to them, do not speak louder, and do not assume they are stupid. Take your time and be patient. If it is especially difficult try using Google translate. It is important to “Avoid using jargon, slang, and idioms. These may not be understood and could confuse the patron. Opt for simpler words, and try not to use contractions” (Crossing Language Boundaries: Helpful Hints for Librarians | Dia! Diversity in Action – El Día de Los Niños, El Día de Los Libros) “Keep a vocabulary list on hand to help you provide specific information in another language. A number of libraries around the country have developed these “cheat sheets.” It’s okay to point to the word or phrase you are trying to convey” (Crossing Language Boundaries: Helpful Hints for Librarians | Dia! Diversity in Action – El Día de Los Niños, El Día de Los Libros) If a patron brings in their child to act as their translator, talk directly to the adult. It’s easier to talk to the person you are talking to, but it is also respectful and will convey that they are welcome in the Library.

Implementing these changes is going to be challenging. As it should be. It’s going to take a lot of time and patience, but it will be worth it. Making patrons feel welcome in our space is the utmost priority. If all patrons do not feel welcome in the Library, then what is the point of being open? Libraries have a history of excluding patrons based on their race, ethnicity, and social status. To continue to move forward, libraries need to take action now. Instead of when they are called out.

**Bibliography**


Why is it important to discuss accessibility in a public space, like a library? With the conception of the ADA, many public servants felt that individuals with disabilities were served well and that their needs were met, simply by compliance. I believe we can, and should, do better. Universal Design is “The philosophy and practice of planning facilities and services right from the beginning so that they are usable by the widest possible range of people, including people with disabilities. People with disabilities shouldn’t be an afterthought, after every is already planned.” (2020) We need to go beyond ADA compliance and work to make our library accessible on a larger scale, for patrons with diverse abilities.

Universal Design has seven principles that can be applied to the library. Though these originated as architectural principles, many of these ideas can and should be applied to the library. Equitable Use is the first, meaning that the library is designed specifically for people with diverse abilities. The second principle, flexibility in use is that said design accommodates a wide range of preferences and abilities. The third principle is simple and intuitive use. The library should be easy to use, regardless of who the patron is. If an non-english speaker comes to the library, they should still be able to effectively use our space because of its intuitive nature. The fourth principle is perceptible information. The design of the library communicates effectively to the patron regardless of sensory abilities. Something like a bathroom sign with braille would be a good example for incorporation of this. The fifth principle is tolerance for error meaning that the design minimizes hazards or accidental occurrences. The sixth principle is low physical effort. The design should be such that a patron can move comfortably through a library without large effort. The last principle incorporates size and space for approach and use. This said, it is important that there is correct space and size for patrons regardless of their body size, posture or mobility. (2020)

Applying Universal Design is a more difficult idea in reality than in practice. Creating an action plan is most important to start tackling these issues. The next part of this memo gives practical suggestions via different sections of the library. The important areas to focus on in a public library are physical accessibility, programming accessibility and website accessibility.

Action Item 1: Physical Accessibility

The requirements needed for physical accessibility start with the building itself in a library. Many things can be easily applied. For glass doors, patrons with visual impairments can have a hard time knowing they’re there. By putting a frost design or magnet on the glass doors, it becomes more obvious that the doors are real. The next big accessibility hurdle in library
building is upkeep in furnishings. The ADA specified aisle width but something else to consider is keeping stools and book carts to the end of the aisles. A stool in the middle of an aisle makes that aisle inaccessible. Another important aspect of building upkeep is to make sure chairs are pushed in. While this requires work from library staff on a regular basis, this makes buildings far more accessible. (Rile, 2002)

In the advent of starting to provide more accessibility, things that were found important by the Baltimore County Public Library should also be taken into consideration. Things that they found important for accessibility in the physical environment were Braille signage inside the library stacks and content, in the bathrooms, and outside the library like where the curb starts and where the book drop is. Their evaluation of accessibility brought to light the importance of owning assistive technologies that can be used. Some of these products were a text/image enlargement system, a screen reader, and more. In the study, one branch had the majority of these technologies. Demographics should be looked at to more evenly distribute the technology. (2015)

Action Item 2: Programming Accessibility

In the BCPL study, they identified that one of the biggest hurdles to accessibility was staff awareness of accessibility features. This can reasonably be argued for all accessibility. Ergo, if staff were more informed of the ways they can contribute to accessible libraries, they would have a more accessible library already. Then training can begin and tools can be given. In programming, librarians have a very specific role. We either facilitate the receipt of knowledge or we actually do the teaching ourselves. Even in programs that are “For fun” there is a level of information gained from patrons. In this case, not only can we use Universal Design but Universal Design for Learning.

According to CAST, “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.” (2021) But what about accommodations? Surely if someone tells us ahead of time, we can accommodate whatever they need! According to an NCES study, only 19.4% of undergraduates reported a disability to their university. What does this tell us? It says that even at the higher education level, there is something preventing students from reporting their disability. (2019) What this statistic tells us is that there is no way we’ll be accommodating every disability in our programming because not every person with a disability will come forward. We have to design our programs from the beginning, to be accessible.

CAST offers guidelines for instruction to better reach diverse learners that are based on Universal Design. Within the guidelines are three basic ideas. As librarians we should provide: Multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. CAST emphasizes that choice is an important element of learning and that learners who choose what they’re learning, where to sit, and how they will go about things like programming can be essential to engaging patrons. In a program about crafting crochet
frogs, for example, patrons should know all the steps so that they can self-regulate their time. As librarians running these events, we can aid in this by saying, if you are not at step 3, raise your hand and I can assist you to the next step or ask a friend. By giving the option for a choice and the ability to collaborate in community, the patron is engaged in multiple ways depending on what works best for their learning diversity. The same thing goes for representation. Having physical handouts is wonderful but having both physical and digital resources is even better so that patrons can manipulate their resources to their liking. In multiple means of action and expression, it’s important to go about things in multiple ways. Help by giving multiple tools to achieve similar outcomes. Perhaps that program is about a crocheted frog or someone could modify and do a crocheted snake, etc. Some could work with a partner for their creation, while others could work independently. For more information about universal design for learning, visit cast.org.

Action Item 3: Website Accessibility

In Maatta Smith’s study on website accessibility, the following goals were put forth for a public library website. The first goal was that the information is perceptible, meaning it’s easy to read with contrasting colors, easy to see meaning it does not distract the viewer, and easy to hear by users using screen readers. Utilizing things like alt text, captions, and the like can help make a website more perceptible. The next goal was to make the website operable, meaning it can be navigated using a mouse, keyboard commands, and with a screen reader, among other assistive technologies.

The third goal is that the website should be understandable, meaning that the text and content work in predictable ways. The fourth goal is that the website should be robust, so that users can easily and efficiently find the tools they need. For example, I should not have to click more than twice to reach an online reader’s advisory tool, like NovelistPlus.

Overall, there’s much that still can be changed at public libraries to increase accessibility. Whether it be building changes or staff training, it’s important to remember the awareness needed to have this kind of movement library-wide. Through much effort, the future of libraries can be the future information seeking spaces for all.

Works Cited:


Universal Design For Libraries:
(Re)Designing A Learning Hub Accessible To All

Date: 11/4/21
To: Imaginary School Faculty and Staff
From: Emma Rose Ryan, School Librarian
Subject: Universal Design for Learning in Our Library
Ref: Potential Library Redesign

Summary: Our school library is a unique space in that it is a learning hub that is utilized by all members of our school community including students, faculty, and staff. For this reason, it is critical that the space, collection, and pedagogy of the library is efficiently designed so that diverse groups of people --each with unique challenges, skills, and needs-- can get the information and resources they need. One way to optimize the school library for all of its potential users is to apply the framework of Universal Design for Learning. This method approaches accessibility from an ideal perspective, suggesting that, by considering different conditions, disabilities, or needs, all learners benefit. Using this educational design philosophy, I have assessed our school library and identified general areas for improvement.

Introduction: For decades, libraries and other public spaces have been providing services to individuals with disabilities using the “accommodation model” of access. Within this framework, individuals with disabilities or marginalized needs would be required to self-advocate to an institution, which would then provide an augmentation or accommodation of their existing services to the disabled person. While this mode of access does provide those with disabilities services they need, from an equity standpoint it is insufficient. Enter Universal Design, a new way of providing services that requires ground-up revisions of a space or system to accommodate a variety of needs (Hinchliffe, 2020). Meanwhile, the Center for Applied Special Technology took Universal Design a step further, augmenting the concept to apply to pedagogy and educational methods as well as physical spaces. According to CAST, Universal Design for Learning strives to create educational environments that work for all learners regardless of their various levels of physical or mental ability (“Universal Access,” 2021). As the librarian of this educational community, it is my obligation to build a library that is specifically designed to serve all students that need it without the need for after-thought augmentations to achieve equity. The concept and aspirations of UDL are very much in line with that goal, and I feel that researching the intersection between UDL, and libraries will help us make the most deliberate, useful changes possible to our existing library.

While Universal Design for Learning was not initially conceived of by libraries, it has been put to use with great success in the field. The ACRL recently created a resource for applying UDL to library instruction (Keeping, 2020), and a post by Jennifer Sturge in American Association of
School Libraries expanded applications further by exploring UDL in the context of remote learning (Sturge, 2020). An article in School Library Research, titled, *School Librarians as Ambassadors of Inclusive Information Access for Students with Disabilities*, does an excellent job articulating the ways that educators, including librarians, can use the framework to transform their environment. It states that educators should be advocating for “a space that is physically accessible, information that is intellectually accessible, specialized instruction that meets the needs of each individual student.” It goes on to expound upon this idea of ‘intellectual accessibility’, saying all aspects of a library should be, “inclusive and multimodal or multi-encoded, providing a multisensory experience,” (Subramaniam, 2013). This means thinking outside the box to design aspects of a library that can achieve the main goal of an information hub, communication of information, in more than one way so that the maximum number of people can make connections and comprehend what is needed.

**Purpose:** Using the above best practices, I have examined our library space and cited some general areas of concern that we might consider re-designing for greater utility and equitable access.

**Action Points:**

**Action Point 1: Beyond ADA Compliance, Creating An Accessible Library Layout**

According to these sources, there are a number of ways that school libraries, in general, could reconfigure themselves in order to better accommodate students with disabilities. To most, the most obvious first step in this process is to ensure that the physical space a library occupies is built to accommodate those with disabilities affecting mobility, along with other physical challenges. The DOIT resource on library access has an exhaustive list of features that a library’s physical location must have in order to be fully accessible for all. Some of these attributes include appropriately sized entrances and exits, automatic doors, and wheelchair usable ramps wherever possible (“Universal Access,” 2021). A core element of Universal Design for Learning is that there should be no space open to the public that is not accessible to those with mobility needs. For example, in our library, there is currently an unramped elevated platform that contains several public access computers and a portion of our maker space. While we do have other computers and spaces that are wheelchair accessible, it would be in the best interest of the community if all areas were accessible. Beyond architectural or building-specific hurdles, other resources like Barbara Paciotti’s *Disability Accessibility in the School Library* also remind those designing collection layouts to be mindful of aisle space between bookshelves, ease of movement between aisles, and ease of access to things like computers and the circulation counter. In general, this resource and several others emphasized the need for careful consideration of how collections are stored, and whether people of all sizes and levels of ability can access those collections equally. In the case of our library, while the space between our shelves is ADA compliant, I feel that further spacing and lowering of some books off of high shelves could benefit the entire user base. In addition to these structural considerations for a
library’s physical space, various resources also emphasized the importance of accessibility within collections as well (Paciotti, 2020).

**Action Point 2: Multimodal, Accessible Collections**

While it might seem as if accessible facilities are the only concern when considering accessibility, Paciotti and others advise digging even deeper than this when it comes to intellectual accessibility, saying the principle must extend to the libraries materials and collections as well (Paciotti, 2020). In School Librarians as Ambassadors, the authors note that, from reviewing various sources, they’ve found that material such as, “e-books, audiobooks, talking books, graphic novels, MP3 files and other digital media, Playaways, large print, DVDs, closed-captioned videos, streaming videos, podcasts, and Braille (Subramaniam, 2013),” all provide a point of access for students with a variety of intellectual and sensory needs due to disability. By providing the same “text” in multiple mediums, librarians can broaden the number of students that can intellectually access and benefit from that text. In the context of our library, I feel the concept of multimodal mediums of communication needs much wider applications within our collection. A great deal of research over the past several years has demonstrated the incredible benefits audiobooks can provide struggling readers (Whittingham, 2013). And while more research is needed to determine if audiobooks serve as a full equivalent to reading physical books (Moore 2016), they are certainly critical tools for those who rely entirely on the aural mode for information. Despite this, they make up just a tiny fraction of our fiction collection and existing budget. The same principles apply to graphic novels, and other modes of information access which can be critical to certain students becoming engaged in essential material. I feel our collection could benefit form a considerable broadening of horizons when it comes to new types of materials.

**Action Point 3: Accessible Pedagogy and Practices**

In a library that already has an optimized layout and collection of materials, the final component toward true accessibility is a reimagined pedagogy. This is truly the element of Universal Library design that relies most heavily on CAST’s Universal Design for Learning framework. According to Laura Saunders and Melissa A. Wong in chapter 6 of their book *Instruction In Libraries and Information Centers*, librarians can, “can examine and enhance their pedagogy (Hinchliffe et al.,2020),” by focusing on the three central main principles of UDL, “Multiple Means of Engagement, Multiple Means of Representation, and Multiple Means of Action and Expression,”(“Universal Access,” 2021). By presenting materials in a way that is flexible, multimodal, and differentiated to accommodate a variety of learning speeds, a librarian can give all of their students an equal opportunity to learn and grow. As it relates to our library, I feel there are a number of adjustments I can make to my lessons that will support this educational style. For instance, when conducting our sixth grade research project on animals, asking students to research how all five senses might perceive the animal they have
chosen to study can foster multiple means of engagement. Asking students to draw a diagram of their animal in addition to writing a description of that animal will encourage them to engage with multiple means of representation. Finally, giving students the choice to go beyond the paper and create videos, sculptures, drawings, or narratives that they can specifically connect to their research will encourage multiple means of action and expression. Combining these pedagogical methods with other critical frameworks like inquiry based learning will allow students the kind of active, immersive educational experience that can best support their learning.

**Conclusion:** Based upon the research I have done on this topic, I feel there is a very clear academic consensus that the principles of Universal Design can be highly beneficial to the reimagining of school libraries. By taking the principles of multi-modal communication and access and applying them to every aspect of the library experience --including the physical space, the physical collection, and the practiced pedagogy-- a library can be fully transformed for the betterment of students with disabilities. I truly believe this kind of transformation is critical to our library’s success both today and in the future. I hope to drive this change over time in this position as I continue to design and build a useful, accessible, shared resource for our community.

**References**


Subramaniam, Mega; Oxley, Rebecca; and Kodama, Christie. 2013. “School Librarians as Ambassadors of Inclusive Information Access for Students with Disabilities.” American Association of School Librarians.

Whittingham, Jeff; Huffman, Stephanie; Christensen, Rob; and McAllister, Tracy. 2013. “Use of Audiobooks in a School Library and Positive Effects of Struggling Readers’ Participation in a Library-Sponsored Audiobook Club.” American Association of School Librarians. <www.ala.org/aasl/slr/volume16/whittingham-huffman-christensen-mcallister
Digital Literacy skills are becoming necessary to survive in the United States. Individuals need to be able to send emails, format their resume, fill out applications and search for job listings in order to earn a living. Digital literacy can also be incredibly meaningful and enrich people’s lives through increased communication with loved ones, increased opportunities for learning, and access to more types of entertainment. Moreover, the library itself is offering more online services and resources than ever before, and even traditional services like checking out physical books expects a base level of digital literacy as more libraries incorporate self check-out systems into their facilities. In order to effectively support our communities, promote the success of individual community members, and ensure that community members are able to access the full breadth of library services and resources, public libraries need to incorporate Digital Literacy education into their programming as a core service of the library.

For many public libraries, limited funding can feel like a major barrier to providing digital literacy programs as new technology can be incredibly expensive. Ideally, libraries would all have idea labs with 3D printers and cutting edge digital design software, but none of this is actually necessary to create digital literacy programs. If we take a step back to understand who is most in need of these services, we will see that digital literacy programs for the most vulnerable, individuals without access to a computer or stable internet connection as well as those who may have never used a computer or smartphone, can be done using a variety of resources that are already entirely free, making this programming incredibly cost effective for the library. For any public library that provides open access to computers and the internet, digital literacy programming can take on an asset-based approach, using a variety of resources that are already free through the internet or provided by the library itself. Here I have laid out potential curriculum outlines for three different digital literacy workshops that could be held in any library with open access computers and a stable internet connection.

Google Tools

Google provides an incredible number of free resources for internet users, including gmail, google docs, sheets and slides, google maps, youtube and much more. Google has so many tools that this could actually be broken into multiple different workshops.

Google Tools for Beginners: Back to Basics
This workshop is for those with little to no experience ever using a computer or the internet, and acknowledges that many of the skills that we might consider intuitive can actually be quite complicated for first time internet users. This would be an hour long workshop dedicated to gmail and google search.

Gmail (30 minutes)
I. Walk patrons through the process of setting up a gmail account.
II. Explain to patrons the gmail interface.
   a. Folders on the left hand side of the screen.
   b. Search bar at the top of the screen.
   c. Account Information at the top right of the screen.
III. Walk patrons through the process of sending an email.
   a. Explain to patrons what their email address is.
   b. Show them the “compose mail” button.
   c. Explain the Recipient, Subject and Body sections of the email.
   d. Walk patrons through sending emails. They can all send each other an email or two, which they can then use for the next section of the workshop.
IV. Walk patrons through navigating their inbox once they have received emails.
   a. Show patrons how to select an email and delete or move to another folder.

Google Searching (30 minutes)
I. Explain to patrons some of the ways in which they can use google to help them in their day to day lives, looking up addresses or store hours, finding recipes, etc.
II. Demonstrate using google search with the library. Demonstrate typing the library’s name into the search bar and show how the library’s hours, address, phone number and website are all easily accessible from the search results page.
III. Explain that google searches can be done with keywords (like the library’s name) or with fully formed questions. In Champaign, Illinois for example, we can demonstrate the search “What time is the Champaign Public library open?” and show patrons how the answer is easily accessible from the search results page.
IV. Explain that this can be used to find information about just about anything and give patrons time to do their own searches with assistance from the librarian if necessary.

Google Tools for Students: Docs, Slides and Sheets
Google docs, slides and sheets are an invaluable tool for students at any level of education, but for many, we are never actually taught to use these tools, working off of an assumption that these tools are simply universally understood. As a result, many of us may be missing out on much of what these resources have to offer, and by providing more hands-on guidance for those first learning how to use these tools, libraries can help students use these tools more effectively. This workshop would be 90 minutes split evenly between Google Docs, Slides and Sheets.

Google Docs (30 minutes)

I. Explain that Google Docs (along with Sheets and Slides) are completely free to use, and can be a great alternative to Word programs which can be expensive.

II. Show patrons how to log into google docs, and show them how to create a new google doc.

III. Explain the interface from within a google doc.
   a. Explain the different buttons on the toolbar at the top of the screen, including the difference between the editing, suggesting, and viewing modes.
   b. Explain the additional tools above the basic toolbar (File, Edit, Insert, Format, Tools).
   c. Explain how to create headings in a google doc, demonstrating how headings can be used to navigate the document.
   d. Explain sharing and commenting located in the top right hand of the screen.
   e. Explain how to name a document and navigate back to the google docs homepage.

IV. Explain the google docs home screen interface including the search bar function, and different methods of configuring the homescreen (List View and Sort options).

Google Slides (30 minutes)

I. Note that the interface on the google slides homepage is nearly identical to google docs and will be the same for google sheets as well. You can also note that many of the icons are the same within the doc, slide or sheet, encouraging patrons that once they have mastered one google tool, they are already well on their way to mastering the others.

II. Focus on the remaining Google slides tools.
a. Demonstrate how to use the background, layout, theme and transition tools.
b. Demonstrate how to create new slides and the different kinds of slide templates available.
c. Demonstrate how to customize slides using text boxes.
d. Demonstrate how to use presentation mode and speaker notes.

Google Sheets (30 minutes)
I. Explain some of the uses for google slides, which primarily include collecting and organizing data but can also be used to create things like class schedules, timesheets and signup sheets. It may be helpful to demonstrate times you have used google sheets as this may be less straightforward than the other tools in this workshop.

II. Work with some sample data. This may be a small collection of books and the number of times they were checked out over a period of time, or a list of library programs and the number of people who attended.
   a. Walk patrons through the process of inputting data into the sheet.
   b. Demonstrate how google sheets can calculate this data.

III. If time allows it may also be helpful to demonstrate how to use a google sheet to make something like a class schedule. Use a sample schedule and walk patrons through the process.

These tools feel natural to group together, but Google docs, slides and sheets could also be explored in more depth and this workshop has potential to be split into a series across multiple days. This could work well as a summer program on digital literacy.

Library Resources: Digital Collections and Resources at Your Local Public Library
This curriculum will look a bit different for every library as the collections and resources for each library facility are unique. That being said, practically every library, they will have a digital collection and/or some assortment of digital resources as well as a library website and even social media pages. The following curriculum is a rough outline that could be adjusted to incorporate the digital resources available at each individual library.

I. Library Website
   a. Walk patrons through finding the library website. Highlight key information on the library homepage like the library hours, address, etc.
   b. Show patrons how they can search the library catalogue through the website.
c. Show patrons how to reserve books and other materials through the library website.

II. E-Library
   a. For libraries with a digital book collection, explain to patrons what app or website should be used in order to access those books and walk them through the process of checking out an ebook.

III. Digital Resources
   a. Many libraries have digital resources beyond their ebook collections, including things like Kanopy and Hoopla for streaming movies and music, as well as educational resources and online news or magazine subscriptions.
   b. Show patrons where they can find a list of the digital resources available to them through the library.
   c. Explain how patrons can use their library card to access these resources.

IV. Library Social Media Pages
   a. Many libraries have social media pages which often have some of the most up to date information about library programs and services.
   b. Share with patrons which social media pages the library uses and how to follow them.

For many librarians, we see the increase in digital collections and services as a powerful way to increase access to free resources, but this is only true if we are also ensuring that information about these resources is readily available to our patrons. Having workshops that demonstrate how to find and use digital resources through the library can be an effective way to increase digital literacy, promote the library's digital resources, and make use of assets that the library already has access to in order to keep the cost of these programs low.

These outlines demonstrate just a few free, online resources that can be used in library programming to provide digital literacy education for patrons, but the internet has an unimaginably vast array of free online resources that we could continue to draw on for these kinds of workshops. A few of these resources include video communication services like Zoom and Discord, digital design programs like Canva and Piktochart, and video sharing services like YouTube.

There is also a need for digital literacy training around smartphones, as these devices become more and more integral to our daily lives. Similar workshops could be developed on using library apps like Libby and Overdrive, using social media apps, and using phone cameras as well as using phones as photo and video editors.

For many libraries, the increased push for digital literacy education to be incorporated into the library services may be intimidating, especially for facilities that may not have access to the
most up to date technology. However, the internet is already a phenomenal asset in and of itself, and without investing in any additional software, libraries can create exciting and meaningful digital literacy programs that can help to ensure that their communities have the skills needed to make the most of the digital resources that are already available through the library at no cost.

Bibliography and Additional Readings


October 22, 2021
To: Tri-City Public Library Board and Head Librarian, Buffalo, IL
From: Emily Boles, emilywelchboles@gmail.com
Re: Digital Inclusion Initiatives for the Library District

The Tri-City Library is uniquely positioned to lead the community forward and foster collaborations to aid in narrowing the digital divide locally. The “Digital Divide” is generally defined as the gap between people who have internet and communication technology and those who do not. Access to the internet, as well as the skills to use internet technology successfully, were a problem for our rural community prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this divide negatively impacted many in the community, especially students, those forced to work from home, and those who lost employment. The three villages that make up the Tri-City school and library districts use the library as a hub for social events, community support, learning opportunities, and technology access. The library and village boards should coordinate efforts and apply for broadband expansion grants. We need not wait to begin. Closing the digital divide requires more than JUST internet and computer access. I propose a series of smaller changes to begin making an impact on the disparities in our community now.

My proposal to narrow the digital divide in the Tri-City community guides patrons through an informal three-step process, as theorized by Jan van Dijk: 1) Motivation and positive attitude; 2) Physical access; and 3) Acquiring digital skills.¹

Background Data

The digital divide is a complex problem to solve. According to the FCC’s “Eighth Broadband Progress Report,” in rural areas one-fourth of the population lacks access to broadband service. The Pew Research Center released new data in August 2021 about the status of rural internet access. Between 2016 and 2021, rural residents saw a 9% increase in those who reported having high-speed internet in their homes. Rural populations are still less likely to report having broadband access at home and less likely to own multiple devices (only three in ten rural residents versus 44% and 43%, respectively, for urban and suburban adults). Perhaps most

¹ Jan van Dijk summarizes his theory for the process of digital inclusion in his August 2020 white paper written for the United Nations on the pandemic and the digital divide. “The access to digital media such as computers and the Internet is a process that starts with a motivation and a positive attitude for using these media. Then people need physical access getting a type of computer and an Internet connection. This is not enough: the next phase is to develop a series of digital skills. After these phase people can use all kinds of applications that are relevant for them. Finally, they hope to find the benefits of using these media. Of course, the outcomes are the main objective of this process.”
importantly, PEW reported in 2018 that, “[A]dults who lived in rural areas were more likely to say access to high-speed internet was a major problem in their local community: 24% said this, compared with 13% of urban adults and 9% of suburban adults.” Interestingly, concerns over access to high-speed internet were shared by both lower and higher income households and those at varying levels of education. Though income, education, and race are often linked to individual characteristics of those left behind in the digital divide, in the rural U.S. broadband access is a wider problem for more residents than urban and suburban areas. ¹

The Tri-City community exists at the intersection of rural access issues and moderate to lower income. The Census Bureau released a study based on the 2018 American Communities Survey (Martin) and Zip code data from the 2010 census ²:

- People with higher incomes were more likely to have internet subscriptions.
- Residents with lower incomes were more likely to access the internet via a cellular plan.
- The total population over the three ZIP codes (62545, 62520, 62515) was 3736 people spread over 119 square miles.
- Median household income for the three ZIP codes ranged between $56,000 and $64,000, which places the area in the lower side of moderate income.
- For reference, Illinois’s median income was $65,886 from 2015-2019. ³

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Digital Divide

Though the Tri-City communities, like most other rural areas, have had internet and communication technology access issues for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures brought these issues into sharp relief. The Pew Research Center data shows that lower income and rural students were the most likely to struggle with technology and internet access to complete schoolwork during the pandemic. As many as 43% of lower income students and 33% of rural students reported that school would need to be completed on a cell phone, while 36% of lower income students and 24% of rural students would not be able to complete schoolwork due to complete access (Vogel, et al).

The Tri-City Elementary Principal Kara Cummins reported that more than 400 devices were distributed to students in the district, which educates just under 700 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. More than 75 cellular WiFi hotspots were distributed to families.

Additional issues created by the widespread closures during the pandemic were access to the legal system (Zoom court) and the increase in telehealth appointments in healthcare. When you

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¹ van Dijk’s figure 1 on page 2 of “Closing the Digital Divide” outlines personal and positional categories linked to the “have not” side of the digital divide.

² Data from Explore Census Data.

³ State of Illinois data from Census QuickFacts.
don’t have stable internet access, a computer, or a quiet space, these online appointments and services become a barrier to access rather than a safety measure or a convenience. Libraries across Illinois have become Self-Help partners with Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO) (Clark and Neal). At the Illinois Library Association annual conference, ILAO shared that 71% of low-income households experience at least one civil legal problem in a given year. These people receive inadequate or no professional legal help for 86% of their legal problems. The online resources, guides, and forms provided on their website could be very valuable for patrons. To address telehealth appointment complications, some libraries are building telehealth appointment rooms to address the needs of rural patrons (McCown). The Pottsboro Library in rural Texas received a grant to build a telemedicine room with sound-proof walls and a computer with a microphone, web cam, and speakers ready to go. Such a space could also be used for online legal proceedings.

Narrowing the Divide: Supporting the TC Community

Motivation and positive attitude

The Tri-City Library already holds a place of positive regard for most patrons. Through volunteer partnerships, the library hosts weekly homework hangouts when the school lets out early, summer reading programs, Christmas gift drives for locals in need, support groups for caregivers, as well as computer and internet access, books, and multimedia resources.

To increase motivation and positive feelings around the technology and internet, I propose the following:

- Increase opportunity awareness by posting information (signage, website, and social media) about what you can do at the library, such as search for jobs, complete online job applications, and access free eBooks and audiobooks. A rotating schedule of sign and post changes may help with keeping interest up.

- Develop a Cyber-Navigator program based on the program in the Chicago Public Libraries. Cyber-Navigators are library employees that are available to help patrons navigate any technology or internet problem a patron may face. Social capital is a large factor in seeking help with technology. “People seek help from those with enough skill who are close at hand, approachable, and familiar” (Williams). By providing technology assistance at the library, we should increase patrons’ social capital and increase their comfort with technology. Due to lack of funding, I suggest a volunteer or internship program with the University of Illinois Springfield and Lincoln Land Community College students. The library could offer internship supervision or community service volunteer hours until funding for paid positions can be found.

- Partner with Illinois Legal Aid Online as a Self-Help Center to provide information to patrons on how to search their website. ILAO provides free training for library staff. If this seems like too large a commitment for the library staff, ILAO will provide
information pieces that the library can display for patrons to help themselves without the need for staff training.

Physical access

- Redesign of the library website to be mobile friendly, as many users access the library through their phones and the website is difficult to navigate.
- Install an outdoor WiFi extender at the library building.¹
- Add outdoor seating to the library grounds to improve usability beyond current library hours. This seating will also be useful for other library programming.
- **Future partnership: work with village boards in Dawson and Mechanicsburg to install outdoor WiFi extenders outside the village halls to provide greater WiFi access for patrons in each town. The villages should ensure parking or outdoor seating is available in the outdoor WiFi **
- Look for construction partners in the community to build a sound-proof space for Zoom court and telehealth appointments.
- Improve library computer security and user management. Use desktop imaging on library computers to wipe user data when each session is logged out. This step will improve patron security.

Digital Skill Acquisition

- The Cyber-Navigator program can assist patrons in developing their digital skills in addition to helping them feel comfortable with and motivated to use technology.
- Volunteer and staff led workshops on using library services, computers, and mobile devices
  - Using your online library account to renew and request items
  - Accessing eBooks & audiobooks through the FREE Libby App
  - Creating an email address and sending email
  - Setting up your mobile device for email
  - Filling out online forms
  - Saving your work on library computers (Google Drive)

References


¹ See Appendix A for pricing and reviews of equipment.


**Appendix A: Equipment Sites and Reviews**
After some research, I believe the Orbi router and extender system from NetGear to be the most reliable, weather-proof, and easy to manage option. I would suggest installing it in the garage of the police station or inside the library vestibule to protect it from weather and vandalism.

- **Best Long Range Outdoor Wifi Extender Reviews** [To Keep You Connected in 2021] from 10beasts.com in 2021 (NetGear Orbi has highest ratings)
- **Best Outdoor Long Range WiFi Extender** from My Best Wireless Routers (no publication date) (second source recommending Orbi)
- **Netgear Orbi Outdoor Satellite (RBS50Y) review** from CNET 2018. $270 each plus new router for each building $400.
- **Park-grade galvinized aluminum picnic tables** with extended table tops to accommodate wheelchairs. $1360 each
One of our chief concerns as informational professionals and custodians of the cultural heritage for the people of Missouri is making the items in our archival and museum collections accessible to our patrons. We have already made great strides in accessibility by making our collections available online and applying descriptive metadata to items in our collections to aid users in searching. However, to ensure that our collections remain accessible to as many people as possible, we must also be careful that the metadata describes our collections in ways relevant to a diverse range of users. The best way to do this, I feel, is to involve our users in the metadata maintenance process. This memo addresses first how we can interest people from outside our organization in contributing to describing items in our collections. Next, I will discuss some of the ways we can organize a user-based approach to metadata maintenance once we have generated enough interest.

Part 1: User Engagement

Before discussing how to facilitate user collaboration on improving collection metadata, it is necessary to address how to encourage user participation in the first place. A study of community engagement in local history archives by Hood and Reid noted the effectiveness of a very simple technique—photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is simply presenting photographs during a research interview. This practice is used to stimulate remembrance in the interviewee and elicit a greater amount of personal detail from them (Hood and Reid 742). Hood and Reid tracked user engagement on a local historical society in Scotland’s Facebook page as it employed this technique. For 30 days a post was made to the Facebook page with a historical photograph and caption. At the end of the study, Hood and Reid observed that 71% of the total comments made on the posts related directly to the photo posted (Hood and Reid 746). They further found that a common theme among those comments was personal connection to the subjects of the photos (Hood & Reid 749). They also observed commenters encouraging others in the community to contribute through tagging (Hood & Reid 757). At the end of their study, Hood and Reid concluded that social media sites such as Facebook could be powerful tools to encourage user engagement in archival collection on both an individual and community level. However, they warn against relying solely on social media for collecting user input on collections because content on such sites is “fleetingly temporal and ephemeral in nature (Hood and Reid 758).” Because of this, I do not see social media on its own as an effective way to crowdsource our metadata management. Instead, I think we could utilize our existing social media presence to generate interest in user participation. Currently, the content posted to our
own Facebook page is composed mostly of links to articles on our website and upcoming events.¹ I think we could generate a greater degree of user engagement with our collection if we utilized the photo elicitation technique described by Hood and Reid. By posting items from our collection with simple, yet evocative, captions, we could get users personally interested in the collection and how certain items are represented in the collection.

Another important way we can promote user participation in improving metadata quality for our collection is through collaboration with various communities within the state. What we should be striving for is to build a statewide network with local cultural institutions, including both local governments and community-specific archives. These are the institutions that would have a more intimate knowledge of how to do outreach for their specific communities that we, as a statewide institution, cannot have. As such, building relationships with these local institutions would be an excellent way of reaching out to these smaller communities. In doing so, we can make community members co-creators in how their cultural artifacts are represented in our metadata. This sort of outreach was done to great effect in Sicily according to a recent study by Bonacini. When museums in Sicily wanted to make cultural knowledge accessible digitally, such as developing online collections and museum audio guides, they worked with various local Tourist Offices, governments, schools, and universities (Bonacini 43-4). In cooperation with these institutions, they developed workshops and lectures to promote participation in developing the digital guides by engaging the people in their local heritage (Bonacini 44). This strategy of promotion through collaboration ended up benefiting both parties. By the end of the project, Sicilian cultural institutions had developed 187 audio guides covering 1700 sites (Bonacini 45-6). The people of Sicily took pride as co-creators in the promotion of their cultural heritage, with 98.8% feeling they had helped promote their culture and it was a worthwhile endeavor (Bonacini 48). In other words, by working with local communities to promote interest in local cultural heritage projects, we can develop a way of improving our metadata that is beneficial to both our organization and the communities we involve in the project.

Regardless of how we engage specific communities, the importance of them being a part of crafting of descriptive metadata for their cultural objects cannot be overstated. This is not just a need to describe our collections more accurately, but to make our collections more equitable. Members of specific communities, particularly indigenous communities have rarely in the past played a direct role in their cultural objects are described. Historically, that privilege has been solely in the hands of elite experts who exclude indigenous voices (Srinivasan et al. 266). Moving forward, we must expand the definition of “expert” to include member of specific communities. By establishing a network of traditional “experts,” such as archaeologists, historians, and information professionals, with the community members providing their own expertise, we can address this historical exclusion while ensuring that we are creating a more diverse and useful metadata record (Srinivasan et al. 269-270).

¹ https://www.facebook.com/mohistorymuseum/
Part 2: Facilitating Collaborative Maintenance

Once we have successfully generated interest in participatory metadata maintenance among our user base and outside communities, our next task will be deciding how we facilitate metadata maintenance. The simplest way to extract user feedback on metadata would be to ask individual users’ opinions on the existing metadata record through surveys. This approach was used by Morgan et al. when improving the search systems for Metropolitan Museum of Art’s online collection. They conducted one-on-one interviews with 46 users representing a diverse range of demographics and interests. They presented each user with images of a series of artworks and conducted interviews to assess how relevant each artwork was based on their individual research needs and adjusting search-related metadata accordingly. At the conclusion of the project, Morgan et al. noted a stark increase in the online collection’s use statics and user satisfaction (Morgan et al. 2012). While this approach worked well for a large institution like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one challenge it would bring for us is including a diverse range of users from across the state. For many, the distance to our main building in St. Louis may be too far to conduct the interviews in person. For others, especially those in rural areas, internet connection may not have enough bandwidth to make interviews over Zoom viable. The best way to implement this strategy of direct interviews in my view would be to make use of the network we build with local cultural intuitions. By cooperating with local institutions to conduct the interviews locally and aggregating the data we receive from them across the state, we could bypass the issues associated with distance and unequal internet access.

Another option for aggregating user feedback on metadata is to involve users directly in the metadata maintenance process through crowdsourcing software. This would allow users to log in and submit their own annotations and suggestions for updating our collections’ metadata record themselves, which would be aggregated automatically by the software. One software that may work well for our purposes is CrowdHeritage. CrowdHeritage is a crowdsourcing program that was specifically designed for cultural heritage institutions and was developed with input by both cultural heritage professionals and their users (Kaldeli et al. 6). Crowdsourcing software would also enable users to evaluate other users’ annotations and facilitate a dialogue as to how to best represent items in the metadata. CrowdHeritage, for example, allows users to up/down vote annotations, with the statistics then viewable by the administrators (Kaldeli et al. 8). This could further be supported by setting up a forum to discuss specific annotations in detail (Bekiaris et al. 16). Again, the downside to an online system like this is a lack of equal access to the internet statewide. This is where our network of local institutions would be helpful. In their analysis of museum metadata crowdsourcing projects targeting indigenous communities, Srinivasan et al. describe one case in which a crowdsourcing database was set up specifically for use by indigenous communities in Australia and computer workstations were set up in those communities for members to make contributions (Srinivasan et al. 273). Equipping local cultural institutions with crowdsourcing software would be an excellent way to receive direct input from communities where access to the internet is limited.
The challenge of updating our metadata record is that the project will always be ongoing. If our metadata is going to remain relevant to an ever-changing user base, we will need to continue making updates as we go and stay connected with the diverse communities whose cultural heritage is represented in our collections. By building a strong statewide network with other cultural heritage institutions and the people of Missouri, as well as utilizing technology that is only making communication between groups easier as it further develops, I am confident we can meet this challenge.

Works Cited


Date: 10/22/21
To: The Joliet City Council
From: Elaine Waite (Elainew4@illinois.edu)
Re: The Old Joliet Prison

Summary

The Old Joliet Prison is a 16-acre property located mere miles from downtown Lockport and an original stretch of Route 66. Built by inmates from Joliet limestone, the Old Joliet Prison has been a filming location for many films such as *The Blues Brothers* in 1980, *Let's Go to Prison* in 2007, season one of Fox’s *Prisonbreak* in 2005-6, and an episode of *Ghost Adventures* in 20019. As a former staff member at the Old Joliet Prison, I have explored every (structurally safe) inch of the property on prison tours and in my down time there, and I can attest to the neglect that the prison is suffering at the hands of the Joliet Area Historical Museum. The focus on tours and making money by renting the space for filming means that the piles of paperwork and furniture that were piled into a warehouse on the property are completely overlooked and slowly deteriorating as the walls slowly succumb to time.

I believe that the prison is still salvageable and can provide an even more immersive and valuable experience for guests if the artifacts and documents were to be collected, organized, and preserved for later presentation. A small but impressive number of visitors to The Old Joliet prison are former inmates, or “fraternity members,” as staff like to call them. Many were incarcerated in the 80s and 90s for varying offenses and return with family and friends to “show off” and share stories with staff. A smaller percentage of visitors are family of a deceased former inmate, looking to learn about the place their father/grandfather/uncle spent time. There is nothing to show these types of visitors beyond the buildings, due to the lack of artifacts that have been sorted. It’s likely we have inmate intake cards belonging to these men or even incident reports that involve them, but the lack of an archive means we cannot connect with these families in a meaningful way. If we were to invest in the preservation and cataloging of these artifacts, we would be able to interact with the public in a way that provides a better understanding of the Illinois and US prison systems and raises cultural awareness of issues faced by inmates.

Background

Construction of the Old Joliet Prison (Formerly the Joliet Correctional Center, formerly Illinois State Penitentiary) began in 1857 and was completed in 1858. Old Joliet was not meant to remain standing after 1925, as the Stateville Correctional Center that opened in Crest Hill, Illinois that same year would be able to hold all inmates from Old Joliet and more. However, prohibition meant that incarceration rates in the 1920s spiked and Old Joliet had to remain open to combat the influx of inmates. After closing in 2002 due to the condition of the buildings
and the addition of newer, larger prisons in Illinois, Old Joliet stood abandoned for 16 years. After a series of fires in 2015 and 2017 that destroyed several prison buildings, it was negotiated with the Illinois Correctional Department that the 16 acres of prison would be loaned to the city of Joliet, who then gave the Joliet Area Historical Museum access to the grounds.

Since it’s reopening, the Old Joliet Prison has seen thousands of visitors drive through its gates to take part in the many different tours offered on the grounds. Tours are given by part-time staff hired by the museum to work exclusively at the prison. While tours provide public access to several buildings with the supervision of a staff member, the majority of buildings are locked up 24 hours a day and are full of artifacts and paperwork left behind by staff and inmates, only disturbed by the various vandals and squatters that took up residence in the space after it closed.

The tours are supplemented with large signs outside of each building that provide background information about each building. There are also QR codes attached to some signs that provide a well-lit 360-degree view of the interior of the building. Much of the information presented to the guests focuses on the inmate experience from 1858 up until the mid-1940s.

The Joliet Area Historical Museum (JAHM) fired their curator and exhibit director earlier this year. This means that any plans for preserving and cataloging artifacts have stopped entirely. Despite police monitoring, the prison site is still not secure, and break-ins occur with regularity. If the artifacts and documents left behind are not collected and preserved, they will likely be destroyed by the elements that come in through the collapsing roofs or stolen by vandals and memorabilia collectors.

Recommendations

My recommendations to the city of Joliet are as follows:

Establish a mission statement for the prison. Currently the prison does not have any mission other than to make money through tours, filming rentals, and events. This a disservice to the thousands of men, women, and children that worked and lived at the old Joliet prison. A mission statement would give a sense of purpose and direction to the staff of the museum and show the community that the prison is dedicated to having difficult conversations with them. A portion of the Philadelphia’s Eastern State Penitentiary’s mission statement is “place current issues of corrections and justice in an historical framework; and to provide a public forum where these issues are discussed.”

Examine and reach out to other facilities of the same nature. There are 89 prison-turned-museum sites in the United States, covering a range of decades, security levels, and demographics (visitors and inmates). Speaking to the professionals that likely faced some of the same issues as Old Joliet when they were starting out will help give Joliet volunteers and staff a sense of direction when it comes to what to keep and what to throw away. A visit to the other
sites would also provide ideas for exhibit content and how the public interacts with dark subject matter you come across in prison documents and artifacts.

Employ a full-time curator and a team of part-time staff/volunteers dedicated to cataloging and organizing documents and artifacts. Provide them with the resources to do this. History students from local high schools and universities could even be recruited for experience/service hours. There are many pieces of office furniture that can be repurposed for collections work to cut down on costs. Pick a secure, stable building on the property to house all organized artifacts and documents until climate-controlled storage can be secured. There are two limestone warehouses on the property that could be cleaned and used.

Encourage a connection to the former inmates that choose to visit the site. Former inmates and guards that disclose their status are encouraged to contact the museum to set up an interview. As there is no curator, there is no one to follow up on that encouragement. The museum has strong connections with the warden of the prison that was present during the filming of *The Blues Brothers* in the 1980s, and two former guards who conduct monthly tours, but there is no input from the men that lived on site. Of course, there would have to be a plan of anonymity when it comes to presenting these men’s histories if they were to be presented, but the input of people that dealt with and used the documents and artifacts left on site could provide a fuller picture for visitors. Many prison sites-turned-museums have direct contact with former inmates in the form of a Q&A that takes place after general tours. By having guests interact with former inmates that are volunteering, we can establish a connection and dispel assumptions people make about inmates after they leave a prison.

Conclusions

My fear is that if the Old Joliet Prison continues to operate under the direction of JAHM, the buildings and information contained within them will disappear and we will lose a fascinating and vital Illinois landmark. The Old Joliet Prison was the second prison built in the state and has seen decades of Joliet citizens pass through its gates as employees or inmates. By establishing a mission statement, examining other institutions in the same business, employing a curator and taking on volunteers, and encouraging follow-ups with visiting inmates, the Old Joliet Prison can engage in a conversation with visitors and provide a deeper understanding of life at the Old Joliet Prison. The more we improve the visitor experience, the more people will recommend the tours and experience to others, boosting the revenue of the prison and paying for the hefty building restoration costs to improve visitor experience further and paying homage to this 163-year-old landmark.

References


Figure 1: A vandalized office in the Vocational Building of the Old Joliet Prison (Author Collection)
Recently, the Pratt’s Chromebook Cohort expanded to include a new cohort for re-entering individuals, or individuals who were previously incarcerated. The Chromebook Cohort, for those unfamiliar with this program, was created to address the digital divide in Baltimore City by providing Wi-Fi enabled devices and one-on-one digital navigation to patrons with limited internet connection and technology experience. We focused our program in the communities surrounding Penn North, Washington Village, Cherry Hill, and Walbrook because the community demographics highlighted a need for digital equity programs in these areas. Because of the success of the original cohort, we are creating a new cohort within the program to address the needs of another marginalized community—individuals who were previously incarcerated, or, as I will refer to them in this memo, re-entering individuals. These individuals face insurmountable barriers to re-entering society because of the digital divide. And it is our hope that the Chromebook Cohort will help re-entering individuals navigate the digital world.

However, the Chromebook Cohort is not the only resource for Baltimore’s re-entering individuals. “Libraries are in a unique position to provide reentry services” according to ALA’s 2019 Google Policy Fellow, Katelyn Ringrose. I believe (and hope!) most of you would agree with that. Each branch, each department, each staff member plays a role in helping individuals who were previously incarcerated re-enter back into the community. The research presented below will underline the need for re-entry focused library services and provide concrete steps you, and the library, can take to make it happen.

**Recidivism and Challenges to Re-entry**

Recidivism rates are painfully high. “Over two-thirds of recently released individuals are rearrested within three years, and over five-sixths are rearrested within nine years” (Ringrose 2). Why are prisons a revolving door? (Renninson 315) Why can’t re-entering individuals...re-enter? While “re-entry is more than recidivism” (Lynch qtd. in Scott), I think it’s important to look at recidivism to uncover some of the problems re-entering individuals face.

Many factors contribute to today’s recidivism rates (prejudice and racism among them). Another major factor is that the quality of life for re-entering individuals is low. I’m talking—living on the streets, no family, no food, no job prospects—low. Every week, over 10,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons (Brodsky) and are encouraged to re-enter society. But how? With what tools? We take for granted our knapsack of skills and connections that we carry around and use everyday—our tech skills (yes, being able to make a
call on a smartphone or order on a kiosk at McDonalds count as tech skills), our friends, family, mentors, and coworkers, our home, our social capital.

Re-entering individuals were “trapped in a time warp” (Hoskins qtd. in Brodsky) while in prison but upon release are expected to step back into society as if they never left. Challenges to re-entry include limited employment opportunities, homelessness, lost family and friendships, digital illiteracy in a digital world, prejudice toward “ex cons,” and more. While libraries aren’t the end all be all to re-entry program and reform, they are “spaces of opportunity” uniquely designed to address these challenges. Librarians are “non-judgmental expert guides” that can provide re-entering individuals with technology help, information and community resources, educational classes, community groups and more (Brown qtd. in Ringrose 1).

Below is a list of ways that the Enoch Pratt Free Library can address the challenges to re-entry. It is only a sample of what libraries can do for re-entering individuals but hopefully it sparks future conversations and ideas from staff members.

**Homelessness**

One out of every five individuals who were previously incarcerated are forced into homelessness (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Currently at the Pratt, you must show proof of address or a photo ID to receive a library card so 20% of re-entering individuals are already alienated from all that the library has to offer by this policy. The Pratt should work to develop Easy Access Cards that do not require proof of address (see Berkeley Public Library). Late fees also disproportionately distance people experiencing homelessness from the library, but the Pratt has already done away with late fees so go us!

Branch staff should also work on cataloging “free and low cost services” available in their area for re-entering individuals and individuals experiencing homelessness (Ringrose 13). Baltimore has created many different websites to catalog shelters, food pantries, and the like, but these digital resources are inaccessible to many community members. Branch staff should take care to have printed copies of community resources that provide directions to services close by. Services to look for may include “legal aid clinics, homeless shelters, health care, child and family counseling, etc.” (Ringrose 13).

**Family Relationships**

“Even a single visit by a family member in a five-year sentence reduced recidivism rates by 13-25%” (Study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections qtd. in Cottrell). The library can’t force family relationships, but it can provide meaningful opportunities for connection. The Pratt can offer to “host video visitations for families separated by incarceration” (Ringrose 13) for the Baltimore City Correctional Center. Many libraries have also seen success by creating reading programs that provide resources and opportunities for people in prison to read to and connect with their children. The Brooklyn Public Library took it one step further and created a program
which “teaches early literacy skills to parents in the justice system and helps them learn how they can play a role in their children’s educational development from afar” (Ringrose 5 and Cottrell).

School librarians and public librarians working with young adults and children can also audit their collections to check for books that represent families separated by incarceration. Almost 3 million children have a parent in jail and libraries can do their part to address the stigma toward the family members of individuals affected by the justice system (Prison Fellowship).

Digital Literacy

The first iPhone was released in 2007. Gmail and Google Calendar were introduced in 2006. And Google Drive was released in 2012. Did you use any of this technology today? Did you even think about it? Did it seem natural, normal, to you? Many re-entering individuals were incarcerated before the advent of technology that toddlers today grow up using. “Recently freed prisoners suffer from a lack of access to technology, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and unable to access social services.” In addition, they are “disadvantaged in finding jobs and schooling their children” (Brodsky). Today even most government services require online applications. The Pratt library offers classes to teach technology like Google Drive, but, because of the pandemic, these classes are all virtual. Patrons must have access to a computer and Wi-Fi and have a basic knowledge of Zoom to take the classes.

The Chromebook Cohort for re-entering individuals is being created to address this gap. The lead digital navigator will provide one-on-one or group assistance in using smartphones and computers to complete tasks like job searching, shopping, filling out government or medical forms, calling friends and family, watching movies or playing games, etc. Tech skills are important for daily living, but also in the job field. “Less than one-half of all released individuals are able to secure a job following their return to society” (Ringrose). Building a resume and searching for a job require vital digital skills especially now that online job searching has doubled since 2005 (Maurer). Employees are also expected to have a basic understanding of technology. Consider how you and your staff can act as digital navigators for re-entering individuals in your area, especially now when in-person services are limited and our lives revolve around our digital devices.

Let’s Get to Work!

Our library has even more resources than this to help re-entering individuals including our Social Worker in the Library program and our Lawyer in the Library program. It’s important that we start expanding our programs and tailoring our resources now. Because of COVID-19, more individuals have been released from prisons than in previous years to prevent outbreaks in (Brodsky). And the first year of re-entry is crucial. "The immediate shock of change is a huge factor in suicides, drug use, and reincarcerations within the first 90 days” (Hoskins qtd. in
Brodsky). Begin preparing library guides for re-entering individuals for your branch and for the library as a whole. Many libraries, including the Library of Congress, have libguides for re-entering individuals. Virtual libguides are great, but make sure to also provide paper versions of the resources available when possible. Some libraries, like the Hennepin County Library, have a video that is shown to re-entering individuals before they leave correctional facilities. This video details all that the library can offer re-entering individuals and how to access those resources.

And, as we undertake this project, have compassion. As always, listen, understand. Recognize and address your own prejudices and look for any blind spots you might have in your understanding of individuals who were previously incarcerated. There is a lot to learn and a lot to do.

Works Cited


Examples of Re-entry Library Guides


Date: October 29th, 2021
To: Champaign Public Library, Urbana Free Library, and School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
From: Zoë Bowlus (zbowlus2@illinois.edu)
Re: Collaboration between libraries and social work students

“I just can’t tell you what it means to a desperate person who is so frustrated and up against the wall to get access to the computer, to get a staff person helping them fill something out or print something out or get those copies for free.”

This is a quote from Carol Inskeep of Urbana Free Library, speaking about how the library met the community’s increased technology needs for “vital human survival” in the face of restricted access in public spaces during the COVID-19 shutdown. These needs include desktop computers, Internet access, printers, copiers, and scanners to

- Apply for rental assistance or unemployment
- File taxes
- Submit information for COVID-19 stimulus checks
- Deal with court and legal issues
- Apply for medical assistance and insurance appeals (Inskeep, 2021).

According to a May 2020 survey conducted by the American Library Association, of the 3,850 participating libraries that were “involved in community crisis response, the majority reported:

- Developing new partnerships
- Making or distributing Personal Protective Equipment
- Addressing hunger relief efforts
- Providing family-friendly facilities”

In terms of new partnerships, the Urbana Free Library partnered with the Cunningham Township, a local government office that provides assistance to vulnerable people, such as those who are homeless, affected by domestic violence, or undocumented. The Township shared information about the assistance they provide and how people can access it, so when people visited the library to fill out the forms, the library staff was knowledgeable about how to help them. Inskeep said the combination of the library’s technology and the Township’s “one-on-one support and social service skills has been a beautiful collaboration.”

“In these really challenging times, where the social safety net is really not providing the basic needs people have in a community, it’s such a challenge as a public library if you want to fill those needs, you want to support people, but you also have to be realistic about how much you can demand of your own staff and how much you're able to do. It’s so great to have this partnership with the township where we’re working together in a web” (Inskeep, 2021).
The COVID-19 crisis may have illuminated and exacerbated the social service and corresponding technology needs of various populations, but these needs exist independent of the pandemic. I offer a starting point for libraries looking to start tackling the aforementioned challenge of supporting patrons’ diverse needs: host a social work student intern.

This internship would involve a(n)

- MSW or BSW (hereon referred to as M/BSW) intern
- M/BSW intern coordinator (to facilitate the internship)
- Field instructor (a social worker who supervises the intern)
- Library employee (known as a task supervisor)

But first, some background:

**What Is Library Social Work?**

Patrons’ needs go beyond books. Examples of social service and psychosocial needs include

- Mental health and counseling
- Educational services
- General financial assistance
- Food assistance
- Employment services
- Utility and rent assistance (Frazier & Hill, 2021)

Aykanian et al. (2020) found that librarians at the University of Alaska Anchorage “were able to provide access information, they felt they lacked training in matching information with the complex needs presented and began searching for an answer to more effectively benefit their patrons” (p. 576-77). Library social work is an answer.

Library social workers

- “Provide support and social service referrals to patrons seeking assistance
- Create and execute staff trainings focused on effective service provision from a trauma-informed care perspective when working with patrons” (Decatur Public Library in-house library promotion cited in Frazier & Hill, 2021)

Zettervall and Nieno (2019) write that “the library has a place in larger systems of care, so library staff don’t have to feel responsible for ensuring the entire process functions well” (p. 23)
They further advocate for practicing whole person librarianship, which is defined as *paying attention to the multitude of factors impacting individuals in society, especially those who are vulnerable and often oppressed due to their race, religion, gender, or economic status* (p. x)

Person-in-Environment, a social work assessment, helps figure out how best to understand and serve patrons.
Why the Library is a Good Space for Seeking Social Services

The library is

● A public space at a central location, which reduces barriers to transportation (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019; Aykanian et al., 2020).
● A safe space: Patrons may have had negative past experiences with social service organizations and may have felt alienated and may harbor distrust (Lloyd, 2020; Giesler, 2020). The library hopefully engenders a sense of safety and trust in patrons.
  ○ Related note: Patrons may have negative, threatening associations with the term “social worker” (e.g. someone who takes their kids away), so consider a more positive, approachable title for the social work student intern, such as “community resources coordinator” (Frazier & Hill, 2021).
● A more “neutral” (Frazier & Hill, 2021) space than a social service agency office
● A protective factor in that it offers “resources, relationships, and opportunities in an individual’s life that mitigate risk” due to their life circumstances (Lloyd, 2020, p. 52)

Why the Library is a Good Internship Site for M/BSW Students

The library provides an internship site that will allow social work students to work at the micro, mezzo, and macro level and “interact with a variety of people and at different levels of intervention” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p. 57). According to a map created by Zettervall (2021), 115 U.S. libraries have hosted social work student interns.

What a Social Work Student Can Offer Libraries and Staff

● **Staff survey and strengths assessment:** Interns can survey and interview the staff to understand what the library is currently doing, identify patron needs and gaps in service, and inform programming (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019; Johnson, 2019). Such an assessment will also provide insight into the staff’s attitudes toward social work(ers) in the library and the library’s accountability for patrons’ psychosocial needs as well as staff interest in trainings; this can help with smoothly integrating the intern, facilitate shifts in library staff culture, and better equip library staff to serve patrons (Johnson, 2019; Geisler, 2020; Wahler, 2020).

● **Community needs assessment:** Social workers can identify “invisible community needs” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p 9), which may be different than what library staff assumed were patrons’ priorities (Lloyd, 2020).

● **Partnerships with community organizations**
  ○ A “relationship-based reference collection of social services in [the] community” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019)
  ○ In physical form, a binder with community resources (Aykanian et al., 2020)
● **Staff training.** Topics include
  ○ Be proactive, not reactive: “Staff members who have a toolkit for understanding the different ways people move through the world are more welcoming to the community and also more resilient and less likely to burn out from work-related stress” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p. 24)
  ○ Acknowledge and “decrease staff biases toward vulnerable populations” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019; Giesler, 2020, p. 413)
● **Modeling of patron interaction** (Giesler, 2020): Such modeling may “destigmatize the presence of patrons who were perceived as challenging” (p. 414).
● **Grant proposals, policy briefs, and program evaluation** (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p. 57)

**What a Social Work Student Can Offer Patrons**

● One-on-one interaction
  ○ Empathy
  ○ Assistance navigating social services
    ■ Social workers can “translate information for clients and help them make sense of the information” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019, p. 5)
      ● Assistance with E-government (Internet-based delivery of social services)
  ○ Referrals to social service agencies and brokers between agency and patron (Giesler, 2020)

**How Library Staff Can Help M/BSW Students**

Zettervall and Nienow (2019) emphasize that it’s important for social work student interns to learn about “library culture and librarianship as a profession” (p. 58). Library staff (perhaps even MLIS students who are also interning at the library) can support social work interns by introducing them to the LIS field.

**What Library Staff Can Do Now**

● Invest in [Mental Health First Aid](#), a “low-cost” training that will help library staff identify and effectively interact with patrons experiencing mental health and substance abuse issues (Lloyd, 2020, p. 51).
● Embed yourself in the community! Hinze (2016) suggests that librarians “go where people in the community go to get help ... or get things done” to “see and hear first hand the needs of the community” (p. 30). This could include affiliations with schools, community centers, churches, senior centers, and more.
Fill out a PIE chart for yourself. Zettervall and Nienow (2019) write that “being able to name and define your own influencers is the first step in self-awareness for identifying and managing personal biases” (p. 26).

![PIE Chart Worksheet]

Make It Happen: To-Do List for a M/BSW Library Placement

- Library contacts School of Social Work field education staff
  - Discuss internship guidelines and requirements.
  - Establish a relationship between supervising library staff, a field instructor, and the intern.
  - Develop a learning contract with internship goals.
- Prepare physical space: Consider if the library space currently ensures patron privacy and confidentiality. There will need to be private spaces that are available for phone calls and meetings, and changes may need to be made to accommodate the intern (Aykanian et al., 2020; Giesler, 2020).
- Raise awareness about library social work and what your intern offers: Frazier and Hill (2021) offer ways to “get the word out”:
- Social media
- In-house library promotion
- Social service organizations
- Community organizations
- Local radio/TV/print

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92
The United States of America has acted as a melting pot and a beacon of hope for people around the world for hundreds of years. People come here to try and give their families a better life. As of 2018, it was estimated that about five million students in this country identify as English Language Learners, also commonly known as ELLs (National Center, 2021). However, our libraries and education system often don’t understand the differences that exist in the educational needs of these students.

These children face many barriers to success, but the first, and possibly most difficult to overcome is mindset. ELLs, in many communities around the country are still viewed as ‘other’. Their unique cultures and perspectives aren’t valued. ELLs are often made to feel that they need to assimilate to American culture and values in order to be successful.

Many Americans who have grown up in this country, and whose families have been here for generations, still believe in the adage that if a person comes to the US and works hard, they are sure to be successful. In today’s society, there is no longer plentiful work in factories and mills that will allow for a good lifestyle (Rubenstein-Ávila, 2003). This means that parents are often working long hours in a physically demanding job in order to simply put food on the table for their families. This doesn’t even account for the trauma that these individuals may have experienced in their home countries and the scars that may be left due to their past circumstances.

This sometimes means that when young ELLs come to this country, they are left feeling confused with the happenings of their daily lives, whether it be in school or doing normal childhood activities. These children are often in the difficult position of having to try to explain the problem to their parents when they get home before ever trying to determine what the answer is, in a way that is uniquely challenging for ELLs.

There is obvious variation in experience here. Some kids come to the US with their affluent families, having been lucky enough to experience art, culture, and languages, meaning oftentimes they have less of a runway to success. Overall, however, for the majority of these children, the picture is a little less rosy. These kids can be moved around to various schools in different cities or countries before settling somewhere or have parents who work many hours and multiple jobs just to be able to support the family. Regardless of the specific scenario, these children still often have to combat the outdated idea that good students are white students (Rubenstein-Ávila, 2003). I would like to discuss here some ideas of ways to start and bridge the gap for these youth, making them feel welcome and supported in a library.
Diversify the space for patrons

The first thing that can and should be done in public libraries is to showcase diverse titles, featuring characters of different races, abilities, and walks of life. This immediately sets the stage for ELLs that they are walking into a space that they will be accepted in. Another way to make the space feel welcoming is to include library materials in different languages – whether it be flyers of upcoming events or instructions on how to check out materials.

Provide foreign language instruction for staff

Basic competency in at least one foreign language should be required for all staff after a year. Similar to how many institutions require yearly sexual harassment training for employees, libraries should begin enforcing staff engagement with a foreign language. If all staff knows at minimum basic phrases to assist patrons who come in seeking assistance in a foreign language, so much of the burden will be taken off of the few who do have that familiarity. Monthly classes should be offered to staff to help them develop and brush up on these skills.

Use library funds to develop well rounded graphic novel collection

It is well known that children love graphic novels. They will often pick one up before they will pick up a traditional book. In some circles, they are almost considered gateway books, to get children further interested in reading. Not only do these encourage literacy, they are extremely helpful for ELLs. Graphic novels can help these children learning the language develop a grasp of new words through the emotions of the featured characters, as well as solidify the literacy skills they already possess. Graphic novels have the added benefit of being educational, helping ELLs learn about history and science through the stories they pick up.

Consider a leveled book collection

Given that these kids already face added barriers to reading, a leveled collection might be a good option to consider for this population specifically. This system is a form of organization that considers a variety of books that a reader at a certain level might like, from books that are on the easy side to those that are more complex. Research shows that if a child is given a book that is too hard for her, she might be turned off of reading permanently (Salem, 2010). This concept doesn’t exclusively apply to ELLs but is more detrimental to them given language barriers or cultural differences that may exist. Reading books at a slightly easier level will allow these kids to really work on comprehension of the story. A leveled system also includes books from all different genres so that kids get exposure to different topics and ideas. According to Salem (2010), this is all in the service of trying to find a ‘homerun book’ for a child, one that they will keep coming back to with the hope that this will create the habits of a lifelong reader.
**Use puppetry during story time**

Puppets are a great way of introducing a book during story time and engaging the reader in the book. This is particularly the case with ELLs because there is the added benefit of helping them understand the material. Some believe that ELLs feel less hesitant or shy when interacting with a puppet than they otherwise might be in a large group (Naidoo, 2005). Puppets are particularly helpful when thinking about bilingual story times, allowing for ties to a child’s own language and culture through rhymes or songs.

**Incorporating makerspaces into the library**

Makerspaces are another way to engage ELLs as well as make them feel wanted and included. These are a great opportunity to help further the topics discussed in a book and to really let children use their imaginations to create, say, their own launch pad to propel a rocket into space. Makerspaces really foster an atmosphere for critical thinking as well as create space for organic social interaction between children. When creating an inclusive makerspace for children of all cultures to enjoy, remember to put out all variety of materials, even those that may not seem to have an obvious use. Some testimonials show that children of different cultural backgrounds may use and enjoy materials that Americans may not otherwise think to include in a makerspace (Murphy, 2018). This allows ELLs to feel that they can incorporate their own history and personality into a project started in the makerspace of their public library. It is important to note that this is a pretty low-cost option to incorporate into a library, making this easy to justify to administration.

Ultimately, there are many options to embrace all children and make them feel welcome in a public library. These listed here, and many, many others allow for education and understanding of American culture while also not making these children feel that they need to leave their own experience behind. I hope that we can continue to work to create a safe space for children and families of all backgrounds and cultures to be together and enjoy the many services that libraries have to offer.


The law changes daily, even hourly. Traditionally, law libraries kept enormous annual sets of laws and casebooks and citators, all updated monthly with little insertable booklets called pocket parts. It was an imperfect solution to the constantly changing landscape of the legal system, and one that seemed to be solved with the advent of the internet and publishers like LexisNexis and WestLaw making up-to-date legal information just a click away. But, like most things legal, it quickly became complicated.

Even among librarians, law librarianship is somewhat shrouded in mystery. While librarians in public or academic libraries focus their practice on fielding a wide array of questions from a diverse user population, librarians who work in legal settings are a few steps removed from the public in many cases. Most work either at law schools or in large law firms, where their user base is small and comprised of experts. The environment a law library inhabits is also usually well-funded.

It is precisely this abundance, the generous flow of funding that law libraries often enjoy because of their proximity to large endowments and high-ticket law firms, that has allowed the specialty’s most important vendors to set a dangerous precedent for information access. Even as we enjoy an age of instantly accessible information, LexisNexis and WestLaw have found ways to exploit and monetize access to this information in ways that keep out everyone except those who can pay their exorbitant subscription fees. And I do mean exorbitant: historically, LexisNexis and WestLaw have negotiated their contracts in secret, requiring their clients to sign NDAs about their pricing (Caselaw 2019). Now, they have semi-transparently made price lists available to the public, where we can see that LexisNexis charges a government or academic institution $50 every time their system is accessed (LexisNexis). Then, for each activity a user does, an additional charge gets added to the bill—$18 to see an ALM Citator, $98 to see a Supreme Court brief, $289 to see a medical illustration. In no universe is this pricing accessible to any institution but law schools with large endowments and government contracts with the full spending force of the federal budget behind them. If a regular person wants access on a bargain basis, the base tier of only their state’s laws is $100 per month ($75 plus a $25 service charge)—but if they happen to click on any search result outside of their plan’s pricing, they can expect a heavy hit to the wallet for their curiosity.

I know, we get it. Law is expensive, it always has been. Who cares?

The people who are languishing in our broken, profit-driven prison system. The people who are trying to navigate bankruptcy on their own without falling prey to opportunistic law firms targeting people in their position. The people who are desperately trying to keep their
apartments, leave their marriages, and right the wrongs in their lives on their own terms. They care. Law librarians are responsible for getting legal information to the people whose lives depend on it. As the carceral system grows, the court system remains impenetrable to non-experts, and these big publishers continue to raise their prices, librarianship is not meeting this challenge to human dignity. Even the American Bar Association recognizes that the gap in access to legal knowledge is only widening, noting that, “Despite sustained efforts to expand the public’s access to legal services, significant unmet needs persist” (American Bar Association 2016).

One might question why Americans’ increasing inability to find legal help is the purview of libraries, and not lawyers. The answer: with official legal counsel financially out of reach, most Americans aren’t turning to lawyers for help. They’re trying to tackle their problems on their own. Especially in domestic, landlord-tenant, and small claims cases, the number of people representing themselves has skyrocketed in the last decade—in fact, more than half of litigants in family law cases are now self-representing (Gorham 2017). Whether this is a recommended course of action is debatable, but the fact remains that most people now keep their own legal counsel.

Then, there are also America’s incarcerated people and their support networks to consider: people for whom access to legal information may literally constitute the difference between life and death. The Supreme Court upheld incarcerated people’s right to access law libraries in the 1977 decision Bounds v. Smith, ruling that “the fundamental constitutional right of access to the courts requires prison authorities to assist inmates in the preparation and filing of meaningful legal papers by providing prisoners with adequate law libraries or adequate assistance from persons trained in the law” (Bounds v. Smith). However, this ruling took place almost 50 years ago, in an era totally unlike our own in terms of information technology, when access to books was the primary question at stake. Now, in this new age of subscription services, law librarians must do everything in their power to make sure that prisoners retain their rights to legal information in order to access the court system. In addition, law libraries must remember to include the non-incarcerated friends, family members, and outside counsel who may be crucial to making the inmate’s petition happen.

In any case, this rise in being one’s own lawyer means that the average citizen’s ability to access up-to-date information about the law is more critical than ever before. In addition, the average person today is more educated and more able to take in and synthesize complicated information like legal information than ever before, which has led to the rise in “DIY mentality” toward one’s own legal battles (Gorham 2017). The newly-minted Matlocks flooding America’s court system to fight on their own behalf need correct, high-quality, up-to-date information about the laws of their own democracy. That’s where libraries enter the picture.

Now, finally, we have a clear lay of the land. We understand why law libraries must take action in order to uphold the AALL’s own stated ethical commitment to not only “promote
open, equitable, and effective access to legal and related information,” but also to “devise, implement, and improve methods for its access, preservation, discovery, and retrieval” (American Association of Law Librarians). The demand for the law library’s service is clear and urgent, and our current approach to distributing resources is not adequate to the needs of the average American. It’s time to let go of the law library’s singular attachment to lawyers and embrace a more holistic approach in order to adapt to the reality of our legal system.

How to rectify these wrongs? Firstly, the AALL must undertake an audit similar to the ABA’s effort I cited earlier in order to understand where the law library profession is failing to meet the needs of the public and draft policy to fill in these gaps. Only by spending real time and money on this situation will the field come up with a holistic, thoughtful solution. Indeed, I would argue that such an audit is mandatory for the AALL to live in accordance with its own charter—to pull from its own stated ethical principles again, the members agree that, “We oppose discrimination based on immutable and personal characteristics, including but not limited to race, color, religion, ancestry, age, sex, gender, gender transition status, immigration status, marital status, protected veteran status, military service, national origin, physical or mental ability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status” [emphasis mine] (American Association of Law Librarians). Now that the organization has been made aware of this problem, it must be addressed with all of the urgency and compassion possible. There can be no delaying.

In the meantime, as Gorham argues in her excellent treatise Access to Information, Technology, and Justice, the immediate solution to these problems of access lies in collaboration. On the state level, law librarians can get involved in efforts to interweave state legal information websites with legal service delivery systems—“They are deemed to be an integral part of future legal services, notwithstanding the fact that we are only beginning to understand how they facilitate access to legal information to those who most need it” (Gorham 2017). Law librarians serve as the intermediary between an information seeker and the information they need about the law, and this expertise fits perfectly into a vision of universally accessible legal information for all people. Librarians can partner with what Gorham calls “Information Providers” to better connect patrons with the legal resources available to them already. This way, while the field pushes for greater access and seeks ways to overcome the paywall problem that plagues legal information, law librarians can lay the groundwork for these improvements by building trust in the communities they serve. For law librarians at law firms, perhaps creating a pro-bono clinic in the style of lawyers could be feasible. For law school librarians, reaching out to the local population and encouraging them to apply for community reader cards could be an effective way to make use of an existing program.

Finally, let me end on this thought from legendary Free Library of Philadelphia director Elliot Shelkrot: “Democracy depends on an informed population. And where can people get all the information they need? —At the Library” (ALA). Thank you for your time and attention.
Bibliography


Executive Summary

All distance students, including those we serve here at Trinity, face unique opportunities and challenges in their educational journey. Getting connected to library resources is crucial to these students succeeding and receiving a robust education. The number of distance students at Trinity is increasing, especially with the newly launched remote Masters of Divinity (MDiv) program. The major impediments for distance students accessing library resources include discomfort with technology, a lack of awareness of library services, difficulty navigating library systems, and a lack of readily available resources. Library staff can help distance students overcome these obstacles by providing a variety of research guides and helps, connecting with faculty and students for library instruction, and increasing investment in electronic resources.

Background

While the number of students pursuing post-high school degrees has decreased, the percentage of distance students has increased. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of students taking online classes increased by 17.2% while the overall number of students decreased by 3.8% (Seamen, Allen, and Seamen, 2018). The COVID pandemic has rapidly accelerated this trend, marking what Gallagher and Palmer refer to as “a critical turning point between the ‘time before,’ when analog on-campus degree-focused learning was the default, to the ‘time after,’ when digital, online, career-focused learning became the fulcrum of competition between institutions” (Gallagher and Palmer, 2020). This trend is evident at Trinity as well. The decision to create a fully remote MDiv program was made this past spring, and already this fall, 45% of new MDiv students are distance students.

Academic libraries are having to adjust to these new realities. According to the standards of the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the principle of access entitlement requires libraries to provide the same access to research help and resources to distance students as they do to in-person students (ACRL, 2016). Thus, in order to keep up with the demand for online education, follow the ACRL guidelines, and fulfill our responsibilities as librarians to serve our patrons, we should make providing resources for our distance students a top priority.

But providing resources for distance learners presents a number of challenges. Perhaps the most obvious is the physical separation between the library and the student. This means
that they are not coming into the library to discover books on the shelves, find a place to study, or seek answers to reference questions. Thus, some of the ways that librarians have relied on in the past to engage students are not possible. In addition, some distance students may not be comfortable with technology. This may produce anxiety and frustration as they seek to navigate the library’s website and its databases. Finally, and maybe most challenging, is a lack of awareness of library resources. Professors may assume that library services are the same as they were when they were students, and thus not be able to encourage their distance students to avail themselves of these resources. In general, distance students are more likely to feel disconnected from their school, and that includes the library. This leads to the assumption that they are on their own in their search for research resources.

Recommendations

Academic librarians can play a pivotal role in the success of distance students by following these recommendations:

● Maintaining a variety of patron-focused contact points

Distance students who visit the online library more often demonstrate a greater rate of self-efficacy in their studies, and librarians can help increase these connections by lowering anxiety and building relationships with students (Tang and Tseng, 2014). In order to reach out to the diverse student population taking online classes, academic librarians should have a variety of ways for distance students to connect with them. This includes phone calls, emails, and a chat service. Quick response times can help build trust between librarians and students and decrease frustration. One of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the proliferation of video conferencing through platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. This mode of communication enables library staff and distance students to see one another. In addition, the screen sharing feature on these programs enables librarians to see a patron’s screen and to help troubleshoot problems. Library instruction workshops can also be done via video conferencing, which allows students in different time zones to attend. Guides on the library’s website can be tremendously helpful for students as well, including written, video, and audio instructions. While the formats will vary, the focus should remain centered on showing empathy for the challenges that distance students face and on meeting their needs (Girton, 2018).

● Connecting with faculty and students to increase awareness.

A major impediment to distance students is simply being aware of the services that are available to them. Some of this stems from professors, who can sometimes be frozen in amber when it comes to their knowledge of library services. This can be remedied by working with the Dean’s office in order to have library instruction integrated into faculty training sessions. In addition, subject librarians should be in contact with their faculty members to make them aware of the services available and coordinate times to do
library instruction in online and modular classes. In addition, holding regular workshops and becoming part of new student orientation increases the awareness of all students, including distance students, of library services.

- **Strengthening relationships with other libraries**

  Establishing reciprocal relationships with other libraries results in having greater access for all students, including distance students. For example, often libraries will charge what you charge for loaning books and scanning chapters and articles. Thus, by continuing to lend for free, we can provide our students with more resources. Also, entering into various partnerships with other libraries allows our students in that area to use a partner library’s collection. In addition, joining interlibrary loan programs, such as RapidILL, enable our distance students to receive resources quickly. Finally, building these relationships enables us to work with other libraries to procure exceptions for our students as needed.

- **Shipping books to students**

  Our library should ship both our own books, as well as books received through interlibrary loan, to distance students located in the United States and Canada. This should include a return mailer, so that students do not have to pay for return shipping. A key reason that students decide to study from a distance, rather than moving to attend an undergraduate or graduate school, is because of finances. Including this return mailer will help remove a fiscal obstacle. While it will require a financial commitment, in the long run it will pay off by helping with retention and student satisfaction. Currently, it is cost-prohibitive to provide this service for students outside of the United States and Canada.

- **Investing in electronic resources**

  Electronic resources provide greater access for a greater number of students, particularly distance students. Rather than even having to have books mailed to them, they can access them from most anywhere. This includes both ebooks and databases with articles in PDF format. This is a shift, particularly for a library that has historically focused on adding print books to its collection. In addition, most professors and many students are used to using and citing from print books. Ebooks can also be quite a bit more expensive than a print copy. However, the ability to extend access to all students, especially for required texts, outweighs these concerns. In a similar way, access to thousands of articles available as PDFs outweighs the ownership of a far fewer number of articles in print that can only be used by one student at a time who is physically in the building.

- **Investing in staff**

  All of the services above are only possible with a sufficient number of staff members to provide adequate support for distance students. Virtual reference assistance is more
time-consuming than in-person interactions (Williams and Steiner, 2011). A full-time staff member should be given the bandwidth to provide support for distance students and participate in committees that oversee distance learning. In addition, a sufficient student worker budget should be maintained so that full-time staff members can help troubleshoot and oversee.

All staff members are involved, either directly or indirectly, with supporting distance students. Therefore, staff meetings should incorporate regular updates from the librarian in charge of resourcing distance students to the rest of the staff. This enables other librarians to answer student questions, provide feedback, and see areas in which departments can collaborate. For example, electronic resources can assist in solving access and database issues.

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Memo

To: Northern Illinois University’s Library Administration and College of Visual and Performing Arts, School of Music Administration
From: Kate Swope, Senior Music Library Specialist, kswope@niu.edu
Re: Embedding Information Literacy Skills into the Undergraduate Music Curriculum

Summary
It is no surprise that first-year college students lack the foundation to be truly skilled in the practice of information literacy. In fact, library anxiety is a very true phenomenon among undergraduate students, so we can’t even get them in the door! These younger students often feel uneasy and nervous about entering the library, not to mention asking for help. They want to be self-reliant in their library search, but how can they possibly know how to navigate the Music Library as an incoming freshman? I often see our younger students enter the library and then leave empty handed. These students must feel as though they should be able to locate items on their own and that asking for help is equivalent to failing. As a freshman our space is foreign, our items are abundant, and our organization is mindboggling. Most of our current music majors are unable to identify who our music librarian and skilled staff members are! So how can we, as Information Professionals and Music Faculty, assist our first-year students in gaining the information literacy skills they need to create a successful and productive time at NIU?

The issue of low information seeking skills is widespread and is not unique to music students. However, at the NIU Music School, there is a wide-spread assumption that our undergraduate students will learn effective information seeking skills simply by showing up to class. It is assumed that undergraduate music majors attain research and writing skills through an ‘osmosis’ effect during their first two years of undergraduate education. Unfortunately, music students’ core classes do not require much research or writing until their third or fourth year, and by then it’s too late. Many faculty members see information literacy as a skill that students will learn implicitly; as a byproduct of their core subject coursework, but this is not true. Information literacy cannot be learned implicitly with the assumption that students will gain effective research skills simply by attending their regular music classes. Information literacy must be taught with careful, thought-out instruction. It must be embedded in an undergraduate’s coursework from the beginning of their time at NIU and scaffolded into their course and with regular assessment activities.

Background
NIU’s School of Music enrolled approximately 181 undergraduate music majors in 2019, many of whom were not required to use library resources until they were juniors or seniors. The core classes that require in-depth paper writing are Music History and Literature classes. By this
point in their undergraduate career, professors assume that students have a baseline knowledge of research and writing skills. Unfortunately, this is just not the case. As mentioned above, it is like pulling teeth trying to get the freshmen and sophomores to use the library.

Our faculty fully support the idea that Information Literacy skills are critical for our students, however their own courses are not providing the desired results. Our music faculty are thankfully pushing library resources onto their student. I see them asking for library tours or one-shot instruction sessions, and they love our print and online finding aids. These are all great resources, and we will keep doing them. But if we want to create a lasting effect on our music students, we must embed our music library resources into the School of Music course curriculum.

Recommendations

My recommendation is that the NIU School of Music moves to an embedded library instruction approach. The current, one-shot library tour and instruction session all wrapped into one is simply not working. Information literacy is essential to all university majors and can easily be integrated into a music student’s education at NIU. Library instruction can be folded into the Intro to Music courses, which are required for all freshmen music majors. These courses include Intro to Music Education, Intro to Jazz Studies, and the like. The courses serve as a foundation for the music student’s area of study while at NIU. Every freshman is required to take this course, making this the most effective place to reach them all. There is no better time than early in their college career to incorporate these essential learning tools.

The task of embedding library instruction into a music course will not be easy. I have noticed that many faculty members do not feel confident in their own ability to teach Information literacy skills (citation and research skills) although, ironically, almost none of them invite the Music Librarian into their classes. In addition, I have assessed that some faculty do not see librarians as “instructors” but rather “servants,” and I can’t blame them. Librarians tend to sit behind the reference desk and provide a service to their students. However, many librarians, including myself, have taken courses in instruction, particularly information literacy instruction. This, along with my extensive music background, puts me in a terrific position to teach information literacy skills and provide a strong music learning foundation for our students here at NIU.

To rectify a lack of information literacy skills among our own underclassmen, I recommend we conduct a survey of current syllabi from our freshmen level music courses and explore ways to embed information literacy into their instruction. Information literacy skills can and should be creative. These skills apply not only to courses requiring term papers, but also to private music lessons and performance focused students. All music courses will benefit from library instruction. For example, we have an extensive collection of vocal works but, due to the nature of how they are cataloged, they are difficult to locate. A few sessions learning about our online catalog and discovering various search strategies will no doubt prove beneficial to our voice
students needing to locate recital repertoire. The same goes for our composition students wanting to view samples of musical scores composed by their professors or other favorite composers.

To create an embedded approach the Music Librarian should:

- Be a true partner in the course planning
- Be given the opportunity to develop a shared set of learning outcomes
- Be given the opportunity to create assignments that enhance information seeking skills
- Be given four full class meetings, spaced throughout the semester, to focus solely on information seeking skills at NIU
- Be given the opportunity to assign and evaluate projects pertaining to information literacy

In doing the above, music students will begin to view the Music Librarian as a trusted ally in their education. This embedded instruction method will also kick start conversations regarding music library integration into all aspects of music education within the School of Music. As with any new educational approach, the Music Librarian, along with a committee of music and non-music faculty should perform regular assessments of the program and be ready to make changes as necessary.

Conclusion

There are many avenues we can explore in increasing our students’ information seeking skills, particularly within music. The NIU Music Library is already conducting library tours, one-shot instruction sessions, and one-on-one reference services to our students. My fear is that we are missing the mark on providing the best possible library instruction to our younger students, and I know we can do better. By embedding library instruction into the Intro to Music courses, we can create a true partnership with current music faculty, become trusted allies in our students’ education, and provide an incredible foundation for our students’ education now and for years to come. This team-based approach to college music education is essential, and I know the NIU School of Music will succeed in this endeavor.

References


14 October 2021

To: Brandel Library Staff

From: Evan Kuehn, Assistant Professor of Information Literacy, Brandel Library

Re: Library Collection Assessment for New Academic Program Proposals

**Background**

North Park University is currently in the midst of an “academic review and enhancement” process where new academic programs have been proposed for study and potential incorporation into the curriculum across numerous divisions. As these programs are being considered, faculty “champions” assigned to each one will assess the university’s capacity for maintaining the program, any needed additions to the curriculum and potential conflicts with existing curricular offerings, and the potential for attracting new students.

Normally a new program proposal originates in a university department. Following pre-approval by the dean of the school or division, a proposal process is initiated by the presentation of a New Program Proposal to the departmental faculty, to the Educational Assessment Committee, and the Curriculum & Instruction Committee (hereafter C&I). C&I then presents this proposal to the Faculty Senate with its recommendation, and the Senate votes to send the proposal to the Full Faculty. Following full faculty approval, the proposal is approved by the Provost’s Office and ultimately by the Board of Trustees.

Assessing whether the library provides adequate resources for a new academic program is important for the program’s future success, but the libraries often play only a limited role in the approval process. At North Park, a faculty librarian sits in the Senate, and the library director serves on the Dean’s Council. In the program proposal itself, the proposing department is asked whether the library has adequate resources for the program. Normally this question is answered in the affirmative, and C&I assumes that adequate consultation and assessment has occurred.

This state of affairs appears to be typical across academic libraries. The Ithaka S+R US Library Survey 2013 notes that fewer than 40% of library directors surveyed agreed with the statement, “librarians at my institution are integrated into institution-wide processes of curricular planning” (Long and Schonfeld 2014, p. 36). The library seeks to incorporate itself and assessment of its collections more officially and effectively into the new program proposal process.

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1 https://www.northpark.edu/north-park-next/
Literature Review

There is not an extensive literature on library participation in new program assessment. Bobal, Mellinger, and Avery (2008) note only one article (Sinha and Tucker 2005) dealing directly with collection assessment for new programs, and describe their experiences in the Oregon State University System from 2000-2008 completing 25 library assessments for new program proposals. Wu and Senior (2016) survey business librarians about their role in academic program proposals.

Both Brin (2001) and Peterson-Fairchild and Burns (2018) discuss the process of building a new library collection for an engineering program, but not the proposal review process for new programs. Klugman et al. (2021) present the Health Humanities Consortium online toolkit for new academic programs in the medical humanities. Library resource costs are mentioned only briefly in the toolkit, but this model can be an important first step in engaging with faculty about preparation for new programs.

Discussion

Library participation in curriculum review and assessment is often a difficult goal to achieve because of power asymmetries within university systems. While the value of shared governance and library-faculty relationships are the basis for library participation, funding of academic programs is a decision made by the administration, and strategic planning for the direction of new academic programs often originates with the administration as well. This puts the library into a position where it is often expected to conform to administrative goals and “make do” with existing resources.

For this reason, even when librarians are included in the new program proposal process, there is a risk of awkward and damaging outcomes. If librarians are asked at the end of a review process whether the collection has adequate resources to support a new program, they are often expected to offer a perfunctory affirmative answer in order to not derail the process. (Wu and Senior, 2016) Later, when programs are established and faculty do not feel that they have adequate resources for their research and teaching responsibilities, the library can be seen as responsible for these shortcomings.

Unfortunately, new academic programs rarely translate to an increased library budget to support these programs, and when new funding is provided, it is usually limited to a 3-5 year term. (Bobal, Mellinger, and Avery 2008) This timeframe allows for the development of a base collection, but not for ongoing subscriptions with rising costs.

Recommendations:

• Address the importance of ongoing subscription costs. Subscription resources are especially important for emerging areas of study, which usually are article-based
rather than monograph-based. While there is no clear solution to this problem, the library should find ways to clarify with administration and faculty the importance of a sustainable journal subscription budget and open access options. These conversations occur on an annual basis when the serials budget is reviewed, and it may helpful for the library to articulate a PAYGO policy for new program proposals: subscriptions or journal bundles needed for new academic programs will be provided, but out of the existing budget (and at the expense of existing subscriptions) rather than from a short-term budget increase for getting the program started. This approach may be painful, but it is difficult to avoid and has the benefit of including other departmental faculty in the conversation about how new programs affect existing programs.

- **Identify Desired Outcomes.** As a library staff, we should articulate outcomes that are attainable rather than ones that alienate us from the faculty or administration. These might include: exploring consortial resource options for new programs, establishing closer relationships with departmental faculty in order to assess departmental needs sooner and to be a part of departmental conversations about new programs, or emphasizing the importance of cyclical assessment for new programs.

- **Establish Mandatory Library Assessment for Review Process.** The library should seek a mandatory library assessment as part of the departmental program proposal, to be submitted to the C&I Committee. In this way, the library can document current collection needs, and even if programs are approved without adequate funding to meet all of these needs, an account of them will be available as a reference point for faculty and administration as budget decisions and accreditation visits occur in future years. This approach will also require departmental faculty to connect with librarians before a proposal is made. Whether this takes the form of a librarian presenting at a departmental meeting, or the departmental champion and the library liaison meeting to write the assessment for the proposal could be decided on a case by case basis.

Situations when multiple academic programs are being studied simultaneously provide an opportunity for the library to establish long-term protocols, but also include risks. If presented with any particular program for approval on an individual basis, the library would probably be able to accommodate necessary additions to the collection. The aggregate burden of numerous programs at once, though, would present strains for the library that are not reflected in any one program proposal. In this such a situation, then, the library should also be sure to communicate clearly with the Provost’s Office an overall assessment of the library capacity for supporting multiple new programs in a single year.
Works Cited

Bobal, Alison, Margaret Mellinger and Bonnie Avery. 2008 “Collection Assessment and New Academic Programs” *Collection Management* 33.4, 288-301.


October 26, 2021
To: University Archives and Special Collections, ANY University
From: Michele Leigh, drleigh@micheleleigh.net
Re: Opening the Archive: Enriching Open Education Resources (OER)

Summary
If nothing, the year 2020 with its pandemic and subsequent need for virtual work and school has demonstrated many of the shortcomings of academia in the 21st Century. Open Educational Resources (OER) are one way in which these shortcomings can be addressed and alleviated. OER “may be defined as any digital materials designed for use in teaching and learning that are openly available for use by educators and students, without an accompanying need to pay royalties or license fees.”1 Because of the lack of royalties or license fee, what usually gets discussed in terms of the advantages of OER is reduced cost for students. This, however, is only one aspect of the importance of OER. OER also addresses issues of equity and social justice. The use of OER creates a space where diversity, equity, and inclusion need not be just topics in the course, but part of the pedagogical underpinning and integrated into student participation and ownership of their education. It is here, that OER opens a space for Archives and Special Collections to move beyond being gatekeepers of history and memory, to active participants in the creation of equitable access to knowledge and in the enrichment of education for all students.

Background
The concept of Open Educational Resources is still relatively new in terms of pedagogical approaches to teaching in higher education; hence many institutions of higher education were crippled when the pandemic hit the United States. The first instance of an OER took place in 1999 when the University of Tubingen published a video series of its online lectures, making them open to the public.2 For many though, the OER movement was officially launched in 2001 when Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) President Charles Vest announced that MIT would “establish a groundbreaking and unprecedented new program, OpenCourseWare. . . The goal of the OpenCourseWare project, Vest explained, was to make all of the learning materials used by MIT’s faculty in the school’s 1,800 courses available via the Internet where it could be used and repurposed as desired by others without charge.”3 Beginning with just 32 courses the first year, it quickly grew, inspiring similar programs in other countries (like China) and states,

1 Hew, “Use and Production of Open Educational Resources (OER): A Pilot Study of Undergraduate Students’ Perceptions.”
2 “The History of Open Educational Resources Infographic.”
3 Plotkin, “Free to Learn Guide - Creative Commons.”

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such as California, as well as, other institutions in the U.S. and around the world. In 2006 the Khan Academy was launched which expanded OER to the K-12 sector.1

By 2010, when Hal Plotkin published the *Free to Learn Guide*, scholars at more than 250 colleges and universities, a majority of them outside the United States, had participated in the OER movement in some manner.2 Plotkin laments that in most cases, OER adoption/creation in the United States came about without institutions of higher education devoting “meaningful material resources to this effort.”3 The lack of institutional and governmental support has changed significantly in the last eleven year as more institutions encourage the promotion, creation, and adoption of OER. Additionally, the Department of Education has awarded $24 million to the Open Textbook Pilot program which in turn funds OER creation at individual institutions, system wide and at the consortium level. Most recently the Consortium of Academic and Research Library in Illinois (CARLI) received at grant for $1.08 million that it will turn around in subawards to fund 8-10 OER projects statewide. It is estimated that this $24 million dollar investment will save U.S. college students more that $220 million.4

OER textbooks are created by educators, peer reviewed by experts in the field, and help to reduces student expenses. OER, however, is more than just textbooks. It also includes all the ancillary materials attached to the course, including but not limited to: lecture notes, video recordings, slide decks, study guides, tests/quizzes, and assignments. Taken together OER materials contribute to successful learning outcomes and open opportunities for equity and social justice. OER changes the landscape of higher education teaching and learning, potentially offering students agency over the materials they are learning and how they learn them.

**Recommendations**

This purpose of this memo is to suggest that College/University Archives and Special Collections are poised on the brink of a unique opportunity to make their collections Open and accessible through participation/collaboration in the creation of OER materials. Archives and Special Collections, are historically considered to be collections of documents or ‘records’, and even objects, “which have been selected for permanent preservation because of their value as evidence or as a source for historical or other research.”5 For many, especially young college students, University Archives and Special Collections are full of old stuff that only old white people are interested in reading or seeing.6

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1 “The History of Open Educational Resources Infographic.”
2 Plotkin.
3 Ibid.
4 “Durbin, King, Smith, And Sinema Secure $14 Million For Open Textbook Pilot Program In Senate Appropriations Committee Annual Spending Bill | U.S. Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois.”
5 “Archive Principles and Practice: An Introduction to Archives for Non-Archivists.”
6 “What Are Archives?”
That said, Archives and Special Collections fulfill a vital role as “our recorded memory and form an important part of our community, cultural, official and unofficial history.” Yet, Archives and Special Collections are not seen by most college students as having a vital role in their education. In fact, I would warrant that most college students are not even aware that their college or university even has an archive or special collection. An archive’s value is not just in its collection, but in its use. Opening the Archive and Special Collections to inclusion in OER, not only increases usage of archival materials, it also begins to address issues of access and equity. Giving college students the opportunity to interact with primary sources is an invaluable learning experience. The interaction with archival materials also provides students with critical tools to understand and interrogate the historical, scientific, or cultural significance of those objects. Finally, I would like to posit that collaboration between OER creators and College/University Archives and Special Collections has the potential to transform those collections to truly be inclusive and reflect the culture and memory ALL the students, faculty and staff.

Challenges

One of the primary challenges of course will be legal in nature, the issue of ownership and copyright. Open Educational Resources typically are “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits sharing, accessing, repurposing -- including for commercial purposes -- and collaborating with others.” This type of access runs counter to the way Archives and Special Collections function. Traditionally they have been concerned with preservation and must navigate a host of legal concerns which include issues related to “intellectual property, the privacy of individuals mentioned in materials, the conditions under which certain types of materials can be accessed and made available, and the protection of the integrity of digital materials from accidental or deliberate tampering.” These issues are not to be taken lightly and crucial to the inclusion of archival materials in the OER classroom, which is why we suggest including a specialist in copyright law on the OER team. This person would work with OER creators and archivists to make sure that all legal aspects are addressed while also ensuring that students have access to the materials as part of their educational enrichment.

Conclusion

1 “Archive Principles and Practice: An Introduction to Archives for Non-Archivists.”
2 This is based on my own experience teaching a historiography class that used the university archive and from working in an academic library that also housed Special Collections.
3 Plotkin.
4 “The Societal Role of Archives • CLIR.”
The King’s College Cambridge site notes that in 2013, 306 people visited the King’s College Archive.¹ Now, imagine if they had included some of their archival materials in courses offered at the college, not only would more people be accessing those materials online, but it would also encourage some of those students to check out other holdings within the archive itself. Archives and Special Collections have the power to offer unique and valuable learning experiences through their collaboration with OER creation, thus offering new levels of access and equity within the college experience.

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¹ “What Are Archives?”


Luo et al., “The Power of Open.”


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Preface: The March of Progress and What is Left Behind

As technology advances the question of how to handle obsolete media and hardware inevitably arises. Technological advancement typically comes with little forethought to the potential destruction it causes as the latest hardware, software and storage formats supplant their predecessors. While new technologies bring faster and more reliable access to greater amounts of data, this enthusiasm must be tempered with caution, as there is a clear and present threat that comes alongside progress: The potential loss of access to information stored on older, now “obsolete” formats. Even if the information remains “intact” this provides little consolation if the means of accessing it have been lost, as information that is inaccessible is considered information lost.

Main Item: Media Obsolescence and its Many Facets

Digital Obsolescence is defined by the United Kingdom’s National Archives as “The state in which digital information is no longer available and understandable for use.” They continue to state that digital formats are unique from traditional paper media in that they require active participation by their users to survive. While books can be rebound, texts treated, or their information copied, digital media is a bit pickier, and often cannot be easily transferred to other platforms or formats without specific hardware or manually transferring the data from one system to another.

This issue already exists in the libraries, archives, and offices of the world, with many types of media already obsolete or at risk of becoming obsolete. One common example that immediately comes to the minds of anyone who used computers in the 80’s and 90’s is the floppy disk, introduced in the 1970’s and used until the 1990’s, only to be discarded with the rise of the Compact Disk (CD). Because it was unable to compete with the capacity of newer data storage devices, the production of floppy disks quickly came to a halt, and today you simply cannot find a modern computer with the ability to access their content without significant modification or by finding an old floppy disk reader.

However, floppy disks were incredibly widespread at the time of their creation, and thus a great deal of information is still stored on them, which means that there is still a need to be able to access this obsolete format of data storage. This applies to all forms of obsolete media, which received a great deal of use during their prime but are now at threat of being lost due to obsolescence.
Two-Sided Coin: Hardware and Software Obsolescence

Dealing with media obsolescence is a two-sided dilemma, as both the software and hardware are matters of concern when attempting to access information stored on obsolete media. For one, certain types of software such as the WordStar, a word processing format popular in the 1980’s are no longer in use and can no longer be read by modern operating systems (OS). Furthermore, the hardware that can easily and reliably access the material becomes rarer and harder to maintain as time goes on. Many media formats can only be read by their respective pieces of hardware, such as the floppy disk, and since companies are no longer producing the hardware capable of reading floppy disks, it is only a matter of time before this data becomes effectively lost through the inability to read the information.

Degradation: Physical Destruction

This is assuming that the material, both software and hardware is still in usable condition, as degradation is also another threat to obsolete media. One such media material commonly suffering degradation is magnetic tape-based systems such as Betamax and VHS, wherein the magnetic tapes begin to shed or is otherwise damaged. Furthermore, many older forms of media may be stored inappropriately, with few or no safeguards to protect them from accidental damage or the effects of their environment.

It is all too easy to regard older data formats as useless or to discard old hardware out of hand, thinking it no longer of any use. Many old and valuable pieces of information are stored on equally old formats, many of which require the usage of old hardware to be read, such as microfilms, and without preserving these pieces of hardware, we lose the ability to read the information encoded upon them.

New is not Forever: Vigilance Against Obsolescence

This issue is not solely restricted to “older” technologies and formats as according to The Guggenheim’s article *The Challenge of Archiving Obsolete Media*, even the most modern file formats of today are at risk of becoming obsolete. They already possess archives and digital resources that are difficult to access or at risk of being lost due to current technology being unable to interface properly. Indeed, the CD-ROM developed by Robert Mapplethorpe in 1996 cannot currently be read by modern Windows Operating Systems, and these storage formats are vulnerable to the environment they are stored within, as well as requiring specialized equipment to be read.

Preparations must be taken if modern, seemingly commonplace technologies are not lost to the march of progress and eventual obsolescence, lest we fall further behind in our ability to preserve the information of the past. While it may seem fantastical, it is not beyond the realm
of possibilities that a new type of computer or operating system may be developed that gains widespread acceptance, replacing the Apples and PC’s that so many rely upon.

What was once top of the line and modern would rapidly become obsolete, resulting in mountains of data no longer being accessible due to the advent of this new operating system and hardware. Imagine not being able to open Microsoft Word files, or losing entire hard drives worth of Excel sheets, all because the new operating system is incompatible with older file formats. It can happen, because it already has happened, and being caught with our digital pants down when it eventually does happen should convince even the most technophobic archivist or librarian to take the threat of digital obsolescence seriously.

**Addressing the Issue:**

So how do we address the threat of losing information to obsolescence? *The National Archives of the United Kingdom’s* website not only provides an extensive list of the risks of media obsolescence, but also provides advice on how to counter it.

One of the first things any archive or library can do is take stock of its most at-risk items and collections and identify which require their most immediate attention, typically items that they absolutely cannot afford to lose. These items may include historical artifacts, particularly valuable cultural pieces, or simply organizational records. The process should also include research into which technologies they currently possess that are at-risk of or are already obsolete, allowing them to gauge which items are most likely to be lost due to obsolescence.

Once you have a good idea of which items are most at-risk you can then begin to develop a long-term plan for its survival by identifying staff members who must be involved with its preservation. By selecting and involving these people with the process you can streamline the preservation process and educate them on the importance and specifics of their tasks.

Another approach suggested by the National Archives was the creation of an information register, which includes how much data you have, where it is stored at your site, what its age is, and what range of media formats it is being held in.

Finally, and one of the most important things your library or archive can do is to take stock of what technologies are required to access the items in your collection, whether it be hardware or software. If you do not have the technology, your information may someday be as good as lost.

If you cannot be confident that your organization can access critical information and important media when you need it, you should ensure that you know the amount of unstructured or unorganized data you have, and what plans if any are in place to manage it. By determining the risk of loss of said data you can better convince your colleagues or superiors of the need to take steps to address this problem.
Rocky Road Ahead: Half-Measures and Resolution

Other alternatives that have been suggested are simply printing out hard copies of older media, to ensure the basic data is preserved. J Rothenburg from The Council on Library and Information Resources contests however that this method is “…a rear-guard solution and not a true solution...Printing any but the simplest, traditional documents results in the loss of their unique functionality (such as dynamic interaction, nonlinearity, and integration).

Furthermore, printing out any document renders it no longer machine-readable. Even attempting to transition older formats to newer, more standard forms is a dangerous endeavor, as there is no guarantee that these newer formats will be capable of reading the older data, performing the same functions, or having the same level of cultural value as its predecessor. As Rothenburg states “Society places a high value on retaining the originals so we may verify that their content has not been lost in transcription.”.

It is therefore, more than just a need to preserve information held in outdated systems and formats, but also a need to preserve the original formats they are held in. The early periods of the digital age were, unfortunately in hindsight, filled with many technologies which were unique and functioned only within their own systems. It is therefore imperative we take action to ensure that both the information held on these out of date and obsolete pieces of hardware and the software that runs on them are kept intact, that future generations may benefit from them.

Works Cited:

The National Archives: Managing Digital Obsolescence Risks (UK), 2009  


The Challenge of Archiving Obsolete Media, Guggenheim, 2015  
https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/findings/the-challenge-of-archiving-obsolete-media  

The Museum of Obsolete Media https://obsoletemedia.org/  

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Council on Library and Information Resources  
https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/rothenberg/introduction/#longevity
DATE: October 30, 2021
TO: American Library Association Archives at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana
FROM: Mia Walter, MLIS student at University of Illinois, mawalter@illinois.edu
RE: Forming an ALA Reparative Description Writing Group

PURPOSE
In the wake of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, cultural institutions across the world are reckoning with racism and bias in their archives. While many repositories are calling for using participatory frameworks to broaden their collections, others are also scrutinizing their archival descriptions. Unfortunately, The American Library Association Archives at the University of Illinois has not implemented any such initiative. The American Library Association Archives should join other institutions in forming a reparative description writing group to audit and (re)write descriptions in the ALA Archives.

BACKGROUND
On June 26, 2020, following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, The American Library Association joined countless other organizations and corporations in issuing a press release condemning racism. In their statement, ALA acknowledges “its role in upholding unjust systems of racism and discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) within the association and the profession.” They continue, “we take responsibility for our past, and pledge to build a more equitable association and library community for future generations of library workers and supporters.”

Unfortunately, in the sixteen months since, ALA has yet to expand upon this statement, nor has it outlined actionable steps to address its wrongs. One initiative ALA can and should implement is the creation of a reparative description writing group to audit and (re)write its archival descriptions. Such an effort would be in keeping with ALA’s promise to “build a more equitable association and library community.” It would also bolster ALA’s claim that the areas of “intellectual freedom and censorship” are major strengths of their archives.

The American Library Association Archives is maintained at the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana, and it has been housed in the University Archives since the mid-1970s. With its 1976 centennial around the corner, the American Library Association noticed the increased interest in the history of librarianship and the association, and they contracted with

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1 Hlywak, “ALA Takes Responsibility”
2 https://www.library.illinois.edu/ala/about-the-archives/
the university to preserve their records and make them more accessible. Robust, reparative
description is central to archival access, as I detail below.

ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION

Before going further, it is important to provide a brief overview of the significance and
implications of archival descriptions. Archival description is the process by which archivists
produce descriptive metadata, or data about the data stored in collections. This descriptive
metadata then "allow[s] users to locate, distinguish, and select materials on the basis of the
material's subjects or 'aboutness.'" 1 Descriptive metadata helps users locate (or not locate)
materials within the archives. Depending on word choice, description can also add to or detract
from the authority of these materials. In other words, descriptive metadata is integral to the
function and interpretation of the archives, and archivists themselves are responsible creating
these descriptions.

As Wendy Duff and Verne Harris point out, "personal histories, institutional cultures, gender
dynamics, class relations, and many other dimensions of meaning-construction are always
already at play in processes of records description. Every representation, every model of
description [...] reflects a particular world-view and is constructed to meet specific purposes." 2

Although archivists increasingly recognize the various ways bias and subjectivity enter the
archives through appraisal, description, and preservation, archives retain their power as
"evidence" 3 of the past. To this end, archival description must be an explicitly ongoing
collaborative process that welcomes diverse input—not just from users, but also from outsiders
to the archives. In this work, “neutrality or objectivity, as a vestige of white supremacy, is
neither possible nor desirable.” 4

THE CASE OF THE ALA ARCHIVES

The American Library Association is the oldest library association in the world, and, with more
than 60,000 members, it is also the largest 5. This makes engaging with ALA Archives all the
more disheartening. For an organization made up of information professionals, ALA’s archival
descriptions are meager and often confusing. The University Archives acknowledges this
deficiency. A note at the bottom of the online collections reads, “this collection is managed by
the American Library Association Archives and does not feature precise descriptive information
for each item.” Items don’t just lack “precise descriptive information,” the majority lack all but

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1 Caswell, “The Archive is Not and Archives,” 8.
2 Duff and Harris, “Stories and Names,” 275.
5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Library_Association
rudimentary metadata (e.g., record series numbers and boxes)\(^1\). This makes it nearly impossible to browse the collections, let alone search and locate materials.

Consider, for instance, materials related to ALA’s 1936 conference in Richmond, Virginia. Part of the Jim Crow South, Richmond was a segregated city, which meant Black attendees could not use many of the same facilities as their white counterparts. Instead, they were forced to use a separate entrance and were prohibited from a number of special conference events. Black librarians and academics petitioned ALA to change locations and subsequently openly criticized the hypocrisy of organization.

While the Archives prides itself in its collections related to ALA conferences, materials related to the 1936 meeting—and materials related to race, more specifically—have proved difficult to locate. The subject heading “segregation” produces a total of one result: a digital surrogate of a photograph of Black youth in a segregated library in Alabama, with minimal descriptive text to situate the image. The subject heading “Racial Discrimination” produces five results, each of which either touts ALA’s accomplishments vis à vis racism or documents efforts to improve. While the ALA Archives has subject headings for thirty-three annual conferences, it does not list a subject for the 1936 annual conference, which was among its most contested and most consequential\(^2\) (see fig. 1). Because of the paucity of the archival descriptions, it is difficult to say whether the materials from the 1936 meeting are even archived—a concern that underscores the archival silencing of minoritized groups.

\(^1\) This may be due in part to understaffing. As the archives are maintained by UIUC, it requires some digging to learn the American Library Association Archives staff consists of only two graduate assistants and a program officer who splits her time between other university repositories

RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Library Association Archives is in dire need of reparative descriptions. The following is a list of initial recommendations for forming a Reparative Description Working Group:

- Invite people from across UIUC and ALA (e.g., scholars of Black and indigenous histories; archivists; public librarians) to join the group.
- Collaboratively develop a set of standards to guide the auditing process and archival description.
- Create a public-facing statement outlining the goals of the working group as well as its constraints.
- Invite users and those outside the archives to participate in description. Note: When asking for help from marginalized communities, be respectful of their time and labor and compensate them. Don’t ask others to provide information you can easily find yourself.
- Allow users to anonymously flag harmful content and annotate finding aids.
In the spirit of collaboration and sharing knowledge, I also encourage ALA to look to other cultural institutions that have already begun the work of repairing their archives. Below are a few examples:

**Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia - Anti-Racist Description Working Group**

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia is a loosely-organized volunteer-run organization, made up of archivists, librarians, and allied professionals. In addition to processing community archives, A4BLiP creates and compiles anti-racist description resources, which it makes available to the public.

**Yale’s “Reparative Archival Description Working Group” (RAD)**

RAD was formed in November 2019 and consists of faculty and staff from across Yale’s libraries and special collections. It’s “long-term goals include developing guidelines for repositories about finding, remediating, and documenting instances of harmful language in archival description; improving access to archival collections, both via improved descriptive access points and via improved appropriateness of descriptive terminology (i.e., removing or contextualizing harmful language).”

**Princeton’s “Inclusive Description Working Group”**

Princeton’s Inclusive Description Working Group was formed in response to the university’s 2016 descriptive audit project and is one of a number of working groups within Princeton’s Archival Description and Processing Team (ADAPT). Currently made up of seven volunteers, it counts its processing guidelines among its early accomplishments. The group has also created a public facing “Statement on Archival Description” to let users know the goals and limitations of their work.

**University of North Carolina’s Conscious Editing Initiative**

The Conscious Editing Steering Committee at UNC is tasked with “replacing racist and derogatory language and removing biased language that assumes whiteness as a default” and “updating unbalanced descriptions” in the university archives. Centering collaboration and interdisciplinarity, the committee is also organizing “community conversations” with library staff members to discuss research around archival description.

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1 https://guides.library.yale.edu/reparativearchivaldescription
3 https://library.unc.edu/reckoning/conscious-editing-initiative/
Closing

In the words of Doria Johnson, Jarrett Drake, and Michelle Caswell, “memory work is not just about remembering the past, but about reckoning with it—that is, establishing facts, acknowledging, apologizing, . . . and repairing the harm that was done through both material and immaterial forms of reparation.”\(^1\) ALA must keep its promise, by actively taking responsibility for its past and building a more equitable institution. Part of this work begins in the archives with reparative archival description.

References


\(^1\) Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive," 3-4.
DATE: October 30, 2021

TO: Chicago Public Schools and/or ISBE?

FROM: Jessica Diaz, MLIS student at University of Illinois, jdiaz71@illinois.edu

RE: Giving more attention to our school libraries

Background

Unfortunately, if a Chicago Public School (CPS) student wants access to books, printing, computers, assistance with research, etc., they have to look beyond their schools. Chicago Public School students have been struggling to meet national standards in reading, yet because of limited funding, space, and a constant urge for new technology, libraries are left behind in school plans. This issue affected me and several other students at Prosser Career Academy in the Belmont Cragin area. Although we had a library in our school, only three computers out of a row of six worked, the librarian was any school staff member that had free time and if no one could, the library was closed, the books were so outdated that students were not allowed to touch the books without permission since they’d fall apart, and students were kicked out periodically for staff meetings. It is impossible to forget the struggle classmates and I had to experience when looking for a space. We’d work on projects on staircases, sneak into empty classrooms and the auditorium until we’d get kicked out. This was not only frustrating but disappointing. I remember thinking, “how is this my school, yet we have no space to call our own?” Aside from having no school pride, the student and faculty relationship was always in tension. I currently work for 20 CPS schools, including Prosser and I am disappointed to say that nothing has changed. The schools I work for that do have a library with a librarian, are always proud to show me their space. This makes me realize how fortunate they must feel to have the resource when other schools cannot fathom having such a space.

At one elementary school, Durkin Park Elementary, a windowless supply room is also used as a library. The room being 12-foot-by-15-foot space, only a few students can browse books at a time. The Principle states, “yeah, I’m frustrated. I know we’re better off than most schools, but when I go to other schools (with better libraries) and I see what they have, it breaks my heart. It doesn’t seem fair.” Like faculty, students also make the same observation and one could only imagine what they feel seeing this distinction at other schools (Ahmed-Ullah, 2021). It also makes one curious how students reflect on themselves when they see other students with much better resources. I remember thinking that the state of my school represented how much I can realistically succeed.

Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Teacher’s Union

Nationally, teacher’s unions and politicians go on about budget cuts all the time. The Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU) has been at odds with CPS and even though both sides believe
they are right and care for their student’s education, the ones who suffer after a strike is the students. In 2012, teachers were asking for a 30% pay raise over four years, the final agreement granted them 17.6% raise. Since the funds had to come from somewhere, politicians warn that if the budget does not work in their favor, they will need to make cuts elsewhere - and most of the time, with other services, the library falls victim (Guion Davis, 2014).

About 80% of the 514 district-run schools in CPS do not have a librarian and according to Nora Wiltse, a librarian at Coonley Elementary School, there are only 108 full-time librarians in the district. She indicated that this is down from 454 librarians in the 2012-2013 school years, which is the year of the last Chicago Teachers Union strike. With the five-year contract deal made between teachers and CPS after the end of the 11-day strike on October 31st, 2019, principles are put in a difficult position on where to allocate the funding, which rarely goes to libraries. Wiltse is part of an advocacy group that is attempting to reestablish librarian positions and is the last original member since the rest were laid off or reassigned, or have moved. I can only imagine the discomfort and tension librarians feel while the principal has to take make these difficult decisions.

Wiltse and several other librarians are continuously disappointed with the contracts being agreed upon as it is clear that librarians are considered second-class citizens. Yet, they continue to do their best with what they have. Leslie Westerberg, a librarian from Nixon Elementary, says “I have 750 kids who rely on me and I’m trying to be the best librarian I can be for them (Inklebarger, 2019).”

All ages were included during the 2019 CTU strike
Impact/significance:

The federal No Child Left Behind legislation does not require schools to have a librarian and as mentioned above, when budget cuts are being made, libraries are one of the first things affected. What does this say about the way we think about libraries? Libraries are not an appendage, but an important piece of a critical and optimally functioning twenty-first-century school (Matthews, 2011). Librarians play a major role in the Internet age and especially during a time where the term “fake news” is commonly used. Students need to be able to learn how to research and determine when information is valid or inaccurate. As adults they are going to need to be able to navigate the world and to do this, they need to obtain information. How they obtain this information is where librarians can help. Evidently, there are public libraries that students can use even as adults, but how are students supposed to feel comfortable in an environment they were never exposed to? It wasn’t until I ventured out into my own public library that I found out librarians are more than just clerks. To this day, there are several people that are not aware of the endless possibilities librarians can offer their patrons. Students who are looking forward to go to college, will be disappointed to find out that they were not given the necessary tools to conduct research, which is an essential skill to have for most areas of studies. Rather than learning at the same level as other students in college, CPS students are going to have to play catch up. It was not until I went to college that I learned how to use a database and search for information. Obviously, CPS teachers are going to do their best to prepare their students for college, but they cannot do it alone. They need a team of professionals to prepare the students and part of that team needs to be a librarian. This overall issue will not only affect our schools but libraries in general as from a young age, students are taught libraries are just not as essential in their education. Libraries are not being used to their full potential and we can aid this situation by teaching students the importance of a librarian in their life, whether they go to college or not. Librarians are not dying, they are evolving and teaching students how they work can help them keep up with the changes. Libraries deserve to have genuine appreciation from their patrons and we can build this relationship by incorporating it in the mind of the youth.

Conclusion:

When I first started this memo, I was going to suggest that schools begin a volunteer program for students to learn a little about the librarianship profession and to offer their wisdom to other students and their families. I thought this was a great idea so that students could complete their required service hours and schools did not have to shut down their libraries as often. Yet, it became clear as I began to look at the history of this fight for school libraries that other schools have been calling for parent volunteers and nothing has changed. During the CTU strike, parents were trying to keep libraries open by volunteering, but CTU still shut them down. This caused unnecessary tension between CTU and parents. Students, parents, teachers, principals, and others should not be put in a position to fill in for a
professional librarian. Would a parent or volunteer be accepted as a substitute to a teacher?, all year long? Probably not because it is common sense that teachers need credentials to teach and the same should be thought about for librarians. The more we allow for others to fill in for the position, the less respect we grant for the profession and the more we allow people in power to make an excuse to not fill in the position at school libraries. Also, most schools feel they are complete with just a library, but a library is not complete until it has a librarian. A library without a librarian, is just a room with books and computers. Therefore, we need to change the way we think about librarians and their role in schools. Libraries and their resources should not be considered a service that can just be replaced or sacrificed. This kind of thought process needs to be accepted and spread by the government, CPS, and several others because it won’t be obvious to others if libraries continue to be put last.

**Bibliography:**


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DATE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2021
TO: LIBRARIANS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE
FROM: ROSALYN S WATSON BURHANS Rosalyn2@illinois.edu, ACADEMIC/RESEARCH LIBRARIAN
RE: NEW DEAL LIBRARIES VS THE LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY SERVICES ACT

Professional librarians and the American Library Association (ALA) were central to the uniformity, survival, engagement, and financial support for libraries just after the Great Depression of 1929. The advocacy and engagement of librarians made it so that the mission and values of the ALA became woven into the administrative purpose of funding sources. The down side of being interwoven into the community, however, means that at some periods, the values which seemed evident, become threatened. We may learn from the activities of the librarians of the New Deal, and use their acting upon the mission and principles of the profession to ensure that libraries survive in those times.

Financial and worker support for libraries during the Great Depression through President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal administration projects of 1933-1943 saved and enhanced libraries and library services throughout the United States. The work of librarians who fostered the goals of the ALA created access to library materials and services for communities, who in turn supported the libraries with in-kind donations and enthusiasm and then local and state governments began to support their local libraries as important institutions akin to public schools and hospitals. [1] By the end of the New Deal Projects, the structure and services that had been established by professional librarians became, due to the federal lobbying advocacy of the ALA: the Library Services Act of 1956, further amended to become the Library Services and Construction Act of 1964 [2] during President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s administration, which evolved along with ALA values still, into the Library Technology Services Act (LTSA) and its administration, signed by President William Jefferson Clinton in 1995. The LTSA has survived President Donald J Trump’s repeated attempts to eliminate it because of the lobbying efforts of the ALA. Thus the President of the United States continues to have a large influence on whether the LTSA exists or is funded, as always. And the advocacy of librarians of the ALA must continue to influence congress to support the existence and funding of the LTSA as they had for its predecessors.

The policy position of librarians and the ALA must be continued activism to maintain and grow national and local legislative financial support, as well as community involvement and support for libraries and the tenets of library ethics to support individuals and communities. We must make it a regular practice, as part of the mission and action items of the ALA, to contact your local and federal elected officials to remind them of the value the library holds as an institution within the community.
I have outlined the history of ALA and governmental intertwinement, and how that has protected libraries today below.

Feel free to contact me with any questions.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE LIBRARIES OF THE NEW DEAL

In the early 1900s the US stock market and the value of the businesses that traded their equity there, had become excessively speculative, and banks had been lending large amounts of money backed upon speculative collateral. On October 29, 1929, the stock market collapsed and the inflated value of cash and equity collapsed with it. Businesses were worthless by 1932 as the stock market lost more than 87% of its value. [3] The banks had no money to return to its depositors. The state of the economy was desperate.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was elected President of the United States and assumed office on March 4, 1933. At this time, millions of people were unemployed – after having suffered a one-third loss of income the year before. There was no money for paid work, nor any money for government institutions, namely: hospitals, schools, and libraries. In “A New Deal in Libraries: Federal Relief Work and Library Service, 1933-1943” by Martha H. Swain, the author provides a thorough examination of the various New Deal Projects involving libraries that emerged. [1] FDR “made work” from 1933 to 1943, which we know as The New Deal. The library programs within The New Deal were the Civil Works Administration (CWA), a short term program to give people work, including library work, through the winter in 1933-34. The other program providing library employment funding was the Federal Employees Relief Administration (FERA) from 133-35. Ellen Sullivan Woodland, as the director of the Women’s Division of FERA, employed CWA workers for library work. The library work done by FERA was lauded by the American Library Association Bulletin in June of 1934, calling it “highly desirable and useful.” By 1935, there were more than 1000 FERA library projects in 42 states with 12,000 women performing library work, including professional librarian work. (Swain, 267) [1].

In addition to the FERA money enabling libraries to re-open, the library work performed by the FERA employees was very hands on: primarily providing community members access to library materials wherever they lived or worked. They obtained books via donation drives, provided newspapers, and distributed these to isolated homes and schools by horseback (“library mounties” as they were called in KY), or to fishers by boat and others in the mountains and farms. They opened community libraries where there had been none. They provided reader services by establishing reading rooms in existing structures, including prisons and jails (Riker’s Island, NY), by keeping later hours, and by opening children’s reading services (New York and New Jersey). All of this work engendered the support of the communities and then their governments. This was fortunate since the FERA funds, and in 1935 the funds of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), could only be used to pay the workers. Some states increased the number of libraries five-fold due to the WPA. Community members and local and state governments supplied the rest – from sites ranging from a room in a nursing home, to a chicken...
coop. Local governments also began to see libraries as part of the standard health education and welfare which should be supported financially. (Swain, 267-271) [1].

Meanwhile, Woodward, along with Julia Merrill, chief of the ALA Public Library division developed standards and uniformity among the various projects. The Boston Public Library reclassified its entire collection. The Philadelphia Public Library completed a 5 million entry card catalogue. Numerous bibliographies and journals were created, etc.

By 1938 there were 2,300 new libraries; 38,324 employees; and 3,400 reading rooms. The states provided the materials, and those materials were increasingly recreational. But by December 1941 there were only 16,717 library employees. (Swain, 271) [1]. Libraries were refocused to support the war effort and became War Information Services Programs. (Swain, 282) [1].

THE LIBRARY SERVICES AND TECHNOLOGY ACT

In the years following the New Deal Programs and World War II, the ALA lobbied congress to continue federal funding support for libraries, and congress enacted the Library Services Act in 1956. This legislative library act continued to evolve in the recognition of societal needs, as did the ALA. The Library Services and Construction Act was signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson on February 11, 1964, to provide federal assistance to libraries to improve and implement library services or to undertake construction projects. [2] By 1995, this library support legislation had become the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), signed by President William Jefferson Clinton on October 1, 1996. [4] The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was also formed in 1996.

Along with the broader shifts from War Information to Construction to Technology, the stated purpose of the Library Services and Technology Act (each federal Act must begin with its stated purpose), echoes the stated purposes and priorities of the ALA. [see notes 4 and 5]

Thus, not only the funding, but the purpose of libraries within our society in the United States is promoted with the ALA’s involvement and advocacy within the federal legislature. The sitting president is also affected by this congressional advocacy.

President Donald J. Trump has repeatedly attempted to stop all library funding during his entire tenure in office. “For a fourth straight year, the Trump administration has once again proposed the permanent elimination of the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) [which funds the LSTA grants], and with it virtually all federal funding for libraries... In a statement, IMLS officials confirmed the Trump Administration will once again propose the elimination of the agency, with $23 million reportedly proposed in the 2021 budget proposal to wind the agency down” as well as the elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Due to the ongoing lobbying efforts of the ALA, the President failed in these efforts – instead each year the IMLS budget increased, and the 2020 budget garnered the largest increase for the LSTA in more than a decade ($6.2 million). [6]
The ALA reported that this success is due to “strong grassroots interactions with Congress... our advocates have taken the administration’s proposals seriously, and they’ve made it a point to remind their elected officials of the importance of libraries in their community...The ALA will continue our strategic approach to advocacy, rallying the growing number of library advocates to take action at each step of the appropriations process and to cultivate ongoing relationships with decision makers," says ALA president Wanda Brown. "ALA encourages everyone—library workers and library lovers alike—to email their members of Congress today and urge them to protect library funding.” [6]

SOURCES


4. “The object of the American Library Association shall be to promote library service and librarianship.” The stated mission is, “To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.” The five Key Action Areas are: Diversity, Equity of Access, Education and Continuous Learning, Intellectual Freedom, and 21st Century Literacy. The Key Action areas of the ALA are Advocacy for Libraries and the Profession; Diversity; Education and Lifelong Learning; Equitable Access to Information and Library Services, Intellectual Freedom, Literacy, Organizational Excellence, and Transforming Libraries. The American Library Association. Electronic. Accessed September 17, 2021. https://www.ala.org/aboutala/missionpriorities/keyactionareas

5. Library Services and Technology Act 20 U.S.C. Chapter 72, Section II Purpose : (1) to enhance coordination among Federal Programs that relate to library, education, and information services; (2) to promote continuous improvement in library services in all types of libraries in order to better serve the people of the United States; (3) to facilitate access to resources in all types of libraries for the purpose of cultivating an educated and informed citizenry; (4) to encourage resource sharing among all types of libraries for the purpose of achieving economical and efficient delivery of library services to the public; (5) to promote literacy,
education, and lifelong learning, including by building learning partnerships with school libraries in our Nation’s schools, including tribal schools, and developing resources, capabilities, and programs in support of State, tribal, and local efforts to offer a well-rounded educational experience to all students; (6) to enable libraries to develop services that meet the needs of communities throughout the Nation, including people of diverse geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, residents of rural and urban areas, Native Americans, military families, veterans, and caregivers; (7) to enable libraries to serve as anchor institutions to support community revitalization through enhancing and expanding the services and resources provided by libraries, including those services and resources relating to workforce development, economic and business development, critical thinking skills, health information, digital literacy skills, financial literacy and other types of literacy skills, and new and emerging technology; (8) to enhance the skills of the current library workforce and to recruit future professionals, including those from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, to the field of library and information services; (9) to ensure the preservation of knowledge and library collections in all formats and to enable libraries to serve their communities during disasters; (10) to enhance the role of libraries within the information infrastructure of the United States in order to support research, education, and innovation; (11) to promote library services that provide users with access to information through national, State, local, regional, and international collaborations and networks; and (12) to encourage, support, and disseminate model programs of library and museum collaboration. Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/chapter-72/subchapter-II. Electronic collection. Retrieved September 14, 2021.

October 6th, 2021
To: Legislators of Congress and President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
From: Jeremy Donaldson, jdonaldson9414@gmail.com
Re: A New “New Deal” for Libraries

The public library is a longstanding institution that has been widely accepted by the public as something the government should provide. According to pew research libraries are trusted by 78% of Americans. Much of the public have a nostalgic understanding of what the library provides for its citizens—people associate libraries with access to books and research. However, in the modern day most people do not visit libraries to read books. Libraries are most often used to access the internet. Public policy must reflect a willingness to consider what other functions libraries can serve, so that the institution can survive and continue to be a positive influence in the lives of citizens. Being one of the last trusted democratic institutions, libraries are uniquely poised to tackle major issues facing the public today. This memo uses the principles of the American Library Association’s (ALA) “Library Bill of Rights” to consider what policies can be enacted to address problems facing the people of the United States.

The following problems are all major issues that newly written public policy could put libraries in a position to do something about: the need for digital literacy, an increased frequency of weather disasters, a lack of diversity in libraries, decline in civic engagement and civilized conversation, mistrust in the government, a loss of faith in objective information.

Before giving recommendations about how to deal with these problems, it will help to do a short historical overview of what the Roosevelt administration’s New Deal accomplished for libraries. The purpose of this overview is to dismantle any idealistic concepts that are often attached to libraries and show that there have been struggles in libraries before and lawmakers were asked to rise to the occasion and give solutions—some of which were unorthodox in their conception and implementation.

“...the Chicago Public Library stopped purchasing new books in 1931. The city declared the Library ‘not an essential municipal activity’” (Wiegand)

With 28% of all U.S. citizens having zero income in 1932 libraries started to be seen as unnecessary spending by many areas of the country. Massive budget cuts were taking place everywhere, but despite the budget cuts, collective action was taken by citizens across the country to support 6,000 public libraries (Wiegand).

Despite collective action having a positive impact on libraries throughout the country, many citizens simply lacked access to library services as a result of the federal government’s unwillingness to invest in libraries. Libraries would go on to struggle in this way until FDR’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) invested $51,000,000 in infrastructure for libraries. With
a population of 120 million in 1930, 45 million of those people did not have access to library services. 88% of those without services lived in rural areas of the country. Dubbed “packhorse librarians,” women workers would ride horses to these remote areas of the country providing access where it was needed (Wiegand). The unorthodox creativity of the packhorse librarians is something we need to consider for the problems we face in contemporary libraries (Wiegand).

Another problem during this period was that in 45 urban libraries there were readers’ advisor (RA) services: programs created with the intention of advising readers away from “weak reading.” Often these advisories would employ stereotypes surrounding gender, race, class, occupation, and personality traits. The programs took a didactic tone, which further drove patrons away from considering the suggestions. Patrons wanted to come to the library for the freedom to get what they wanted, not to have someone tell them what to read. Most libraries did not carry popular novels because of the RA, so readers who were interested in such material had to resort to borrowing from private lending libraries located in retail stores of the period. (Wiegand).

**Recommendations**

“I feel like nobody goes to the library for books anymore. Everything seems to be online. So it would only make sense that, you know, with books came the librarian, and with computers came the CyberNavigator, you know?” (Williams)

Each library should do a job search, reaching out to citizens with vast knowledge of technology, who also have deep ties to their communities. After identifying these people, they should be hired for CyberNavigator roles in their public libraries. Funding for this, and numerous other suggestions I will make in this memo should be provided by a modern reincarnation of the WPA, which will serve contemporary public needs. The importance of CyberNavigators in the modern library was demonstrated in a 2012 University of Chicago study. CyberNavigators are workers who help patrons with any questions or concerns they have regarding their usage of the internet. The Chicago Public Library’s staff created a branch library with CyberNavigators having a significant presence in the library. One CyberNavigator claimed that they had more interaction with patrons than the traditional librarians because there are more patrons that are concerned with the internet than there are looking for books (Williams). Every library in the country should have CyberNavigators who provide the services seen at the Chicago Public Library.

CyberNavigators can work towards solving a multitude of problems facing public libraries. First, by selecting members of the community, libraries will begin to address the diversity problem. Poor people and marginalized communities are less likely to have ties or resources connected to libraries, which causes them to be less likely to visit a library or know what is offered. By placing members of traditionally underserved communities in libraries, we hope to see members who would not normally use library services begin doing so. Additionally, establishing more workers who are there to help patrons learn the language of the internet can help them
secure jobs, and boost confidence in a world that is increasingly dominated by internet technology.

“The library became the community water distribution hub as hundreds flocked to the building with containers to meet the trucks with well water” (Pottsboro Library emerges as emergency preparedness leader following Deadly winter storm).

In times of crisis libraries can and should be used as hubs to make connections and gather resources needed to materially improve citizens' lives. Pamphlets and/or training should be provided to librarians throughout the country educating them on how to build community gardens for food insecure communities. Bikes should also be provided to check out at public libraries, giving citizens transportation to jobs and important events. And just as women workers brought books to rural citizens on horseback in the 1930s, the library should be using infrastructure spending to establish internet connection for people who do not have access.

Over the last five decades, weather disasters across the world have increased by five times what they once were (McGrath). Severe weather concerns is a reality we are facing, and one small library in Pottsboro, Texas is a model to look to for how public libraries can do their part when disaster inevitably strikes. After a Texas power grid went down in February 2021, many residents of Pottsboro Texas were left with no power and no running water. Dianne Connery, Library Director at the Pottsboro Library, worked with members of the community to provide solutions to problems where they could. Farmers took water to people in town without access and unable to leave their homes. The library also used social media, text, and phone calls to provide people with the resources they needed to improve their situation (Connery).

The city was not able to provide what the library was in this situation, because they were not in contact with members of the community. Instead, the board of the town only talked amongst themselves. The Pottsboro Library also does significant infrastructure, provides bicycles for patrons, a community garden, and internet access for people at home who might not otherwise have it (Connery). In the 1930s there was a divide between rural and urban areas, making access to books harder for rural areas, the same is true about internet in the modern era. 14.5 million Americans lack access to broadband internet, and nearly 100 million Americans are not subscribed to internet. The lack of access to internet is most significantly felt in rural areas, and amongst poverty-stricken people. In comparison to In addition, jobs are less likely to be located in rural areas than in the 1930s, and citizens need ways to travel to their jobs, so providing bicycles and other forms of transportation is increasingly necessary (Eighth Broadband Progress Report).

**Video Games and Netflix**

Libraries should also face the reality of what younger generations are interested in. Research shows that 91% of children between the ages of 2 and 17 play video games. In addition, data collected on popular streaming services show that children stream platforms such as Netflix 15
times more than they go outside. Community events surrounding video games and popular streaming television should be embraced in libraries throughout the country. Providing weekly viewing parties of the most popular Netflix show, or community tournaments for the newest competitive video game is a way to entice younger generations into coming to the library and building trust in the community. If video games and Netflix are the primary thing kids are concerned with in the modern day, walking into a library might make them feel unwelcome and the library might have a similar effect on them as the didactic RA services had on citizens seeking popular novels during The Great Depression (McAlone, Reisinger).

Conclusion

This memo is intended as a starting point for addressing some of the problems librarians are capable of dealing with in modern day libraries. Providing CyberNavigators at public libraries, giving the public internet access wherever they are, providing them with the means to get to their job, responding to disaster by working as a hub to connect people, creating resources for food insecure communities, and hosting community events that will be of interest to young people are all ways to begin addressing the problems we face. The truth is, distrust in government, lack of diversity in libraries, distrust in objective truth, and a decline in civic engagement are all problems that we will begin to see improvements upon by creating strong community ties and a trust in the library. By seeing our citizens as equals rather than people we should smugly talk down to, the public will see the library as a significant institution that exists to serve the people.

Works Cited


