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The Value of the Library on Campus Today

Academic librarians and library service directors have redefined what an academic library is, and what value it can impart to campuses and students around the globe.

What makes an academic library valuable to a college or university community? The library isn't just a place for student research and book-finding: It's a way for any academic institution to catalog their history, engage their students and faculty in learning, and further their research and educational goals.

2/3

of students report satisfaction with their academic libraries

But do students, staff, and faculty see libraries the same way? The influence of the internet has led to greater connectivity and access to information, allowing students to bypass the library in pursuit of knowledge. Today's academic libraries face new challenges. Not only do they need to keep their patrons in the know and prepared to exit academia with the knowledge to do great things, but they also need to keep themselves relevant.

Create that "third space"

The best academic libraries embrace the mentality of a "Third Place" — a physical area, separate from class or home, that acts as an anchor and facilitates broader, more creative interaction with the community. Originally described by Ray Oldenburg in 1989, the characteristics of a "third place" are:

- *Free/inexpensive*
- *Offers food/drink*
- *Highly accessible*
- *Involves regulars*
- *Brings together new/old friends*

The academic library certainly fits these criteria, but why is this so important? A third place helps the members of its community establish a sense of belonging to a space as well as ownership and familiarity with their surroundings. For students just coming to campus, the library is a safe haven to explore and get accustomed to their new home. But what makes the academic library so valuable is that it's not just a physical space — it provides a virtual "third space" as well.

HIGHLY ACCESSIBLE

Through online databases, the library can connect students both on and off campus. No matter where they are in the world, their academic library provides a lifeline back to the campus and the community. As a result, students near and far are able to engage with the library from beyond its walls, extending that sense of belonging to their campus community.

CRAM SESSION IN THE LIBRARY CAFE, ANYONE?

The James B. Hunt Library at North Carolina State University exemplifies how a library can be a "third space" on campus. The Hunt Library provides students with multiple cozy reading rooms, an "idea alcove" where students can come together to debate and create together, a game lab, and a cafe. They also have online databases covering everything from Criminology to Poultry Science to ensure students have access to any information they may need. As a whole, the Hunt Library acts as a perfect third space to provide students a place to eat, study, relax, and hang out comfortably.

If you're looking to make your library the best "third space" it can be, think about how to design your physical (and digital) space to meet student needs. Whether it's through installing new lighting, opening up conference rooms for 24-hour access, or diversifying the library cafe's offerings to include vegetarian and vegan options, work to make the library a valuable space for students.

Making the most of your digital space

Do you have a great website, but no traffic? Increase your library's value by making the most out of your online presence. Here are some ideas to get started.

SET UP A SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE

Use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to connect with students on and off campus. Whether it's sharing events happening at the library or letting people know about funny things that have occurred during finals week — social media is a great way to get connected.

CREATE A LIBRARIAN CHAT

For those students who are too shy to come into the library during finals week, keep them in the loop by letting them communicate online with a librarian. Set up a chat function for them to contact research librarians, get help with research, and navigate your online databases.

SURVEY STUDENTS

College kids are an opinionated bunch, so solicit their thoughts on what you can do to make your online resources better. Send out an online questionnaire over campus email and raffle off a prize among those who complete the survey. Then, pay attention to what students want to see, and deliver.

The value of new resources

From coast to coast, academic libraries are supplementing their collections of books with digital resources, new technologies, and opportunities for students and staff alike to get together and improve campus life. To consider academic libraries as little more than spaces for students to thumb through resource books is to disregard the new resources available on campuses.

For example, the Leonard H. Axe Library at Pittsburg State University is renowned for its incredible resources. Part of the reason it's so well-known is that their Access Services Coordinator, Susan Schreiner, thinks outside the box when it comes to adding new technology to their services. She has overseen the creation of a writing center, the addition of digital resources (including half a million government documents and 71,000 online books), and a "student success center," where students can request workshops and tutorials to enhance their learning outside the classroom.

These kinds of resources allow for even more collaboration and innovation in academic libraries. They give students the ability to work together, learn from one another, and establish a community centered on the library. While some libraries face challenges when trying to engage students with these new resources, others are thriving.

HOW MANGO HELPED ONE LIBRARY SHOW ITS VALUE

At Florida International University, the Business and Online Learning Librarian created a badge program to get students involved with Mango Languages. Designed to incentivize and reward students for engaging with Mango Languages on campus, students received a digital badge for each chapter and course completed in a given language. Students could display earned badges on their badge wall and share their completed language chapters (or entire courses!) on their LinkedIn accounts to boost their appeal for professional contacts. By promoting her library's resources and giving students a reason to visit, Hammill boosted Mango Languages' usage by eight percent in just a few weeks and showed students the value of the library above and beyond books.

A central part of the university mission

As you work to show the value of your library on campus, you need to think about how your library impacts campus life, community, and the university's mission as a whole. Today's valuable academic libraries know that the best way to communicate value is to interact directly with the university mission statement and founding beliefs. Take a look at Georgetown University's mission statement, for example:

> *Established in 1789 in the spirit of the new republic, the university was founded on the principle that serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs promotes intellectual, ethical and spiritual understanding. We embody this principle in the diversity of our students, faculty and staff, our commitment to justice and the common good, our intellectual openness and our international character."*

The library is a place where this kind of mission can thrive, perhaps even more so than in classes. The library can bring together people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs to learn from one another and promote understanding between peoples. When one looks at the activity going on in the Georgetown University Library, the same commitment to intercultural connections is easy to see. Collections bring together multiple disciplines to inform students. A digital collection on bioethics includes dense biology reports, ethnographic studies, sociological explorations, and philosophy articles that provide multiple viewpoints around the issue. Students from all over the world can access these documents wherever they may be, spreading knowledge into their communities both inside and outside the university.

Georgetown isn't the only example of a library following the mission of their host institution. Across the globe, libraries are providing places for students and staff alike to get together to learn thoughtfully and critically about a multitude of topics. With the help of the library, schools can prepare their students to enter the world with the character, experience, and open-mindedness needed to make a difference. Think about how you can relate your library activities to the university mission statement.

Prove your commitment to your university's mission

Proving your library's value to your host institution's guiding mission may seem like large talk, but translating it into actions is surprisingly easy. Here are some steps you can take to prove your commitment to furthering their mission:

BITE-SIZE MESSAGING

Break apart the mission statement into manageable bites, and figure out where the library's workings intersect with it. Take for example this piece from Claremont McKenna College's mission: the college seeks to "*educate its students for thoughtful and productive lives and responsible leadership in business, government, and the professions*." If your institution has similar language, you may want to boost your economics offerings with works from new and old theorists, making sure you offer a full range of literature to help students gain new insight in this and similar business and government fields.

DIY STATEMENT

Come up with a mission statement that describes the essential motivation behind everything you do. Try to use similar language as your institution's mission to directly tie your work to what they do.

The value of academic libraries

Today, the academic library isn't just a place for research. As they were years ago, today's academic libraries are central to campus communities, places where students can come together to work, collaborate, and innovate. But they also exist beyond their walls and the confines of the campus. Regardless of where they are in the world, students can access their college communities through online library resources and networks. The library is the place where future leaders gain the knowledge and experience needed to become thoughtful adults, capable of entering the workforce with the research skills, academic background, and critical thinking acumen needed to make the world a little bit better.