Against the Grain

Volume 27 | Issue 1

2017

Optimizing Library Services: Location, Location, Location

Abigail G. Scheg
Elizabeth City State University, agscheg@ecsu.edu

Lindsay Johnston
IGI Global, ljohnston@igi-global.com

Kristen Stauffer
IGI Global, kstauffer@igi-global.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Scheg, Abigail G.; Johnston, Lindsay; and Stauffer, Kristen (2017) "Optimizing Library Services: Location, Location, Location," Against the Grain: Vol. 27: Iss. 1, Article 31.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7013

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Optimizing Library Services - Location, Location, Location ... Libraries Offer Prime Community Spaces

by Dr. Abigail G. Scheg (Elizabeth City State University) <agscheg@ecsu.edu>

Column Editors: Lindsay Johnston (Managing Director, IGI Global) <ljohnston@igi-global.com> and Kristen Stauffer (Director of Electronic Resources & Library Relations, IGI Global) <kstauffer@igi-global.com>

In Fall 2014, I, along with Shelley Rodrigo, and Mary Beth Pennington from Old Dominion University, hosted a community writing workshop on campus at Elizabeth City State University (ECSU). Originally, our idea was to have an open concept time and space for individuals from different institutions, and just around the community, to come together for a specified period of time solely to work on writing projects. This would not be a formal gathering, or an organized workshop or discussion. Instead, it would be what all individuals with a writing project need: time, space, quiet, and support. In our original promotion shared with faculty, staff, and students at different institutions, as well as community members, I stated that I would be available to talk about writing projects with anyone that wanted a sounding board. However, most of the time would be spent quietly, and individually, tackling our writing projects.

Since we wanted this idea to be so broad and inviting, we thought that it would be best suited for a community space — something not affiliated with one of our institutions. But, as a new venture, we had little time, uncertainty of interest, and zero budget. We discussed community gathering spaces that we could plead with to waive a rental fee. We discussed just taking over a coffee shop or a Panera, but decided against it since we didn’t know how many people we would have. We discussed a community library space, but found that became too problematic due to their limited hours on a weekend. Finally, we decided that ECSU’s campus provided a good venue, and a central location for the invitations sent to individuals and institutions in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina. Although I would have had access and approval to use my campus classroom and office building to hold this workshop, it lacked a central space that was sufficient for this purpose: close enough that individuals could find one another and talk if need be, but not a small enough space so that we are all sitting together at a table to work on our projects. Instead, we decided that ECSU’s G.R. Little Library would provide a good space for this purpose, and give writers access to library materials should they want to utilize any of them in the time that they were there.

The library space turned out to be an incredibly productive location for the writers who attended this workshop. The workshop was scheduled for a Saturday, and just a few weeks before the workshop, ECSU announced that the library would be closed on the weekends because of budget cuts. The workshop was still held, but because it was otherwise closed, it was a quiet and focused area for writers. Some writers chose tucked away nook-like desks to record their ideas. Others used the couches, and lounged as they wrote and reflected. Others, myself included, staked out a large table where I could spread out all of the items in my traveling work kit: notes, resources, laptop, coffee, and water bottle. We were close enough that someone could find me if they had a question about the space or the resources, but separate enough that we were all able to identify a place where we felt the most comfortable and productive. And the possibilities of libraries as tremendous assets for community space came to light. continued on page 67
Library Space: Something We Take for Granted Until We Need the Quiet

As a composition instructor, I require my students to not only conduct online research, but also to visit the library as well. Many of my students don’t know where the library is on campus, they don’t know how to find a book or a journal online, and they certainly don’t know how to follow the call number to get to the book on the shelf. Although in some ways the processes of research, publication, and library resources are changing, they are of fundamental importance to all students and community members, even if these individuals do not realize the great potential and opportunities. Libraries are undoubtedly changing. Some resources and publications are entirely online, causing shelving to be emptied or eliminated. Card catalogs are now coveted design materials on HGTV, and not what holds the organizational secrets of library materials. Libraries are not limited by the physical space of the building, but now offer hundreds and thousands of resources that we can access from our classrooms, offices, bedrooms, dorm rooms, and hotel rooms. The space, though. What of the tremendous buildings that stand on our campuses and hold the secrets and knowledge?

The space is one of the reasons that I have my students go to the library. I hear about college roommate horror stories, residence hall “study room” fails, and stories of students harmlessly walking across only to be kidnapped by their friends and taken to fast food restaurants. Recreational spaces on a college campus are not always designed to be the most conducive study spaces, but campus libraries often have comfortable and quiet study spaces with room to spare. For students who struggle with a place to go, or a quiet change of pace, the library could be their refuge, as it was for the writers during our workshop. I also think that the space is one of the tremendous offerings that libraries have for 21st-century faculty members. As educational allies, sharing spaces can be one of the smallest steps leading to one of the greatest accomplishments.

I strive to maintain open lines of communication between library staff, and our department at least. I also serve as the Library Liaison for our department, letting other faculty members know of events, budgets, journals, and databases that may need to be reviewed, and so much more. Academic libraries in general have done a tremendous job of opening themselves up to communication. At ECSU alone, students (or faculty or staff), can communicate to library staff members through telephone, text message, email, or Twitter, as well as just stopping by the building. Offering so many modes of communication has made libraries, and the research process, much more accessible and manageable for tech-savvy students. When I discuss the library as part of my composition class, I tell my students that there are many ways to contact library staff members in case they don’t have time to go to the library, or are just nervous to go to a new place on campus by themselves. Many students scoff when I make the latter remark, but I have also had several that follow up and say thank you for letting them know that there are so many ways to get in touch with someone.

Making the Best of an Educational Space

When I was invited to write this guest column for Against the Grain, I was given the topic of “What services academic libraries should offer in the 21st century,” coming from the perspective of an academic faculty member. One of the first things that came to mind was increasing online resources and ensuring that distance students have equal access to library materials as their face-to-face counterparts. But I almost felt like that response was the easy way out. A focus on open access materials and digitization is here to stay, and undoubtedly the topic of many, many conversations spanning library staff member conversations, as well as faculty members’ conversations. I thought further into it, and the uniqueness of the library space really resonated with me. Academic libraries are a place on campus unlike any other. While they are social places, they are also educational spaces, and individual spaces. What other place on campus serves in these, somewhat conflicting, roles constantly, as our library spaces do? I find it truly fascinating to think about, but then again, I’m a sucker for a good library nook.

The possibilities of library spaces are endless, and I have a challenge for both academic libraries and faculty members: How can you help to make the library the best educational space for students?