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## Where to Go Shopping for Information: Public Libraries or Academic Libraries?

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cally fielded by public librarians range widely (and wildly) over the interests of toddlers through seniors. What college librarians can provide using depth and breadth of materials, the public librarian needs to locate quickly in more limited resources targeted to answering specific questions. For undergraduates, fewer and more specific resources may be just the right thing. The public librarian brings a different perspective to locating resources in non-academic collections.

Many public libraries employ a technique called "roving reference" to initiate a reference interaction with customers. Librarians are assigned to rove in the library during a portion of their on-desk time. Roving encourages less intimidating encounters for customers who may be shy about approaching a reference desk or "interrupting" a librarian at the desk.

"Are you finding what you need?" is often the prelude to a reference or reader's advisory dialog. Roving librarians also develop skills in reading body language and behaviors to identify customers who may not be finding what they need. Customers learn to look for library staff in the stacks who can help them locate materials.

Public library reference has certainly

changed in a Web world. Reference questions used to range from ready reference to in-depth research. Today customers often find quick answers themselves using Web search engines. They turn to librarians for tougher research questions in more specific areas, such as business law or finance. We hope that successful encounters with knowledgeable reference librarians establish a pattern that students carry with them into their future academic careers and lives.

### Interlibrary Loan

When a student needs resources outside those offered by their own public library, they will likely find convenient interlibrary loan or reciprocal borrowing arrangements. A large public library typically borrows (and lends) several hundred items a month for its customers via interlibrary loan from libraries across the country. Students who live near several different public libraries may well find that a library card for any is a card for all, with the same borrowing privileges from a much larger combined collection. Often the online catalogs are set up for convenient searching across multiple individual collections.

### One-stop Shopping

College students raising young children can take advantage of library programming, reading clubs and Storytimes designed to entertain and promote reading. The student as

Mom or Dad already models the importance of reading in their studies — and can check out quality children's books for their kids to read during study time. The children of students learn an important lesson that reading is an enjoyable way to learn or play together or alone. Families will also enjoy access to free DVDs and entertainment videos at the public library — an economical family activity on a student budget.

And speaking of budget, finding a job in the local off-campus community might be easier with resources available at the public library. Libraries help job seekers with ads and applications, as well as local newspapers and advertising newssheets. Computer resources for test taking and online applications may supplement what students find with on-campus employment offices. And after getting the job, income tax forms and tax help (provided by knowledgeable volunteers) are available each tax season at most public libraries.

While the public library will never replace what university libraries offer students to support research, they provide complementary collections, facilities and services. Libraries should support each other's programs and refer their mutual patrons to the library that best meets their information needs. Wise students take advantage of the strengths of public and academic libraries by virtue of their dual citizenship in both. 🌱

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## Where to Go Shopping for Information: Public Libraries or Academic Libraries?

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by **Samantha Larsen Hastings** (Public Services Librarian, Salt Lake County Library Services, West Jordan Library, 1970 West 7800 South, West Jordan, UT 84088; Phone: 801-944-7646) <SLarsen@slco.lib.ut.us>

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Why do college students frequent public libraries in the place of, or in addition to, academic libraries? For some of the same reasons shoppers choose **Wal-Mart** over the mall, one stop shopping, location, atmosphere and materials. Public libraries are an information seeker's **Wal-Mart**.

### One Stop

The "one stop" mentality is one of the main reasons patrons choose both **Wal-Mart** and public libraries. At a public library, patrons can borrow books for all ages fiction and non-fiction, movies, audiobooks, music to listen to, use online databases to do homework and consumer research, attend programming for themselves or with their children, they can get materials to learn foreign languages, they can surf the Internet, and more underneath the same roof. Public libraries are ideal for nontraditional college students

who have families and need to multitask at their information store.

### Location

The convenience of location is another reason why patrons will go to a public library. Public libraries, like **Wal-Mart** stores, tend to be centrally located in most cities with easy public access, whereas academic libraries tend to be located on university campuses with limited permit parking. Often nontraditional, commuting, or distance Ed students

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***"Reference is not just about resources. It is about users..."***

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### Non-intimidating, Friendly Atmosphere

Everyone is welcome at a **Wal-Mart**, just as everyone is welcome at a public library. When a patron enters **Wal-Mart** they are greeted at the door and they can find assistance throughout the store by "roving" employees. At public libraries, the librarians at the information desk should greet or at least acknowledge every patron they make eye contact with. Librarians have assigned "roving" times to circulate through the library assisting patrons who need directions, ready reference, help with reference questions, and give reader's advisory tips.

### Focus on Current, Popular Materials

Public libraries have many of the same sections as **Wal-Mart** stores, such as gardening, cooking, housing, pets, crafts, self-help, consumer, health, education, and travel. Public Libraries, like **Wal-Mart**, often do not carry

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older materials but focus on newer fiction and audiovisual popular items. **Wal-Mart** stores have many displays and signs to entice the browsing shopper to pick up and purchase items. Similarly public libraries display new titles and offer themed item displays to entice patrons to check out materials. Public libraries also provide “shopping lists” in the form of booklists or pathfinders on topics.

**Academic libraries more like a mall**

While public libraries are like the local **Wal-Mart** store, academic libraries are like the mall. Academic libraries have larger collections, more physical space, special collections, services, a variety of specialty stores, departments, desks, and offer breadth and depth to academic topics. Often as a public librarian, I have recommended that college students go to their academic libraries for more resources, primary documents, and greater selection of online databases.

**Where to Go Shopping for Information: Public Libraries or Academic Libraries?**

Public and academic libraries have different purposes and collections, both are needed by college students, whether they be traditional, nontraditional, commuter, and/or distance Ed students. As **Sara Fine** (1995) reminds, “Reference is not just about resources. It is about users...”<sup>1</sup> Libraries should support each other’s services, programs, and collections by referring college students to the library that best meets the student’s information needs. This can only

happen when both public and academic libraries are aware of what the other offers. College

students are shopping for information, are we sending them to the right store? 🌱

**Samantha L. Hastings**

*against the grain*  
**people profile**

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**EDUCATION:** Bachelor of Arts from **Brigham Young University**. Master of Arts from the **University of Reading**, Reading, England. Currently working on a Master of Library Science from the **University of North Texas**.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Adjunct English faculty at **Utah Valley State College**. Associate librarian at **Orem Public Library**. Currently works as a public services librarian at the **West Jordan Library** and serves as the vice-chair of the **Utah Library Association’s** Young Adult Round Table.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Read, write, eat exotic foods, travel and play tennis.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *Pride and Prejudice* by **Jane Austen**, *North and South* by **Elizabeth Gaskell**, *The Blue Castle* by **L. M. Montgomery**, *The Blue Sword* by **Robin McKinley**, and *The Perilous Gard* by **Elizabeth Marie Pope**. 🌱

**Endnotes**

1. **Fine, Sara**. (1995). “Reference and Resources: The Human Side” *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 21(1), 17. Retrieved November 26, 2007, from **Academic Search Premier** database.

## Satisfaction Guaranteed — A System of Asynchronous Desire

by **Kate Holvoet** (Head, Government Documents, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 295 S 1500 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112; Phone: 801-581-8394) <kate.holvoet@utah.edu>

I have a confession to make. Whenever I walk into a library, I can’t remember the title or author of any book I’ve been meaning to read, or CD I’ve wanted to listen to. Unless I have a written list, I end up racking my brain, vainly trying to recall the name of any author I like, and then browsing the new books section, and then leaving, possibly empty-handed. Sometimes a large space and too many choices are overwhelming, inducing a sort of decision-making exhaustion. Once I graduated from library school, I drifted into buying books rather than checking them out. I went from having more time than money to having slightly more money than time, making a several hour trip to the library too expensive.

Thanks to several popular online book seller sites, I now have an extensive “to read” list. Online bookstore

catalogs often have features such as reviews, ratings, and recommendations that lead me to explore new authors, formats and subjects that I usually wouldn’t come across. What I like about the **Salt Lake County Library** system is that because of the way it is set up, I am 100% guaranteed to have a good experience before I even get there. I don’t have to remember that I read something about a book I wouldn’t usually be interested in — since I already added it to my “to read” list. And once a book is on my “to read” list, it makes its way to my library hold list. Sooner or later, I get an email that it’s in. Sometimes I can’t remember why I wanted it — but I know that I did — so I go and get it. This makes a sort

of browsing experience which means I read books of a sort I never would have read before — because it is so easy to just put them on hold and get to them when they become available. I can browse online, put the book on hold, and be notified when it’s ready, all without ever having to leave my house.

Through this process I fell in love with audio books. I find that I listen to books that I probably wouldn’t read. There is something about the format that suits some books and makes them more compelling. I particularly tend to read non-fiction books as audio, but I do also read novels. The **Salt Lake County Library** system also offers eBooks for download, and the process works for me much the same as with printed books. I go through and find books I think sound interesting — I am reading a much wider variety than I might have in the print world.

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