November 2017

Faculty & Student Perspectives on the Role of the Library

Diane Hirshberg
University of Alaska Anchorage, dbhirshberg@alaska.edu

Iain Miller
University of Alaska Anchorage, icmiller2@alaska.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

 Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Faculty & Student Perspectives on the Role of the Library

by **Diane Hirshberg** (Professor of Education Policy, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage) <dbhirshberg@alaska.edu>

and **Iain Miller** (Graduate, University of Alaska Anchorage) <icmiller2@alaska.edu>

Libraries can serve many functions on university campuses for the academic community and the public, as the repositories of physical and virtual academic resources, as good study spots, and as places where students and guests can access computers or hear a public lecture. Libraries are evolving and changing in response to new technologies and campus needs, but one thing remains constant for faculty and students: libraries play a key role in supporting teaching, learning and research activities. In this article, we — a university professor (**Diane**) and a recent university graduate (**Iain**) — share how we use and view the Consortium Library at the **University of Alaska Anchorage** in our teaching, research and studies.

Diane's Story: A Researcher's Perspective on the Role of the Library

I am faculty at the **University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)**. **UAA** is a comprehensive open access institution (meaning we are open to anyone, without requiring an application) that offers degrees from occupational endorsements and associate degrees, to baccalaureate, masters and doctoral degrees. The main campus where I teach is located in the largest city in Alaska. We serve over 14,000 students, about 8,400 of whom attend full time. Our university also includes four community campuses serving another 4,000 students (Fast Facts, 2016).[1]

We are primarily a commuter campus, with about 2,000 students living in campus housing. Many of our students are non-traditional and first generation students. Almost half of **UAA** students take at least one eLearning course, and enrollment in online options has increased steadily over the past five years.[2]

The Consortium Library (*consortiumlibrary.org*, named as such because it serves both **UAA** and **Alaska Pacific University**, a small private university next door to **UAA**), serves many functions for faculty, staff, students and the public. It is a gathering space; it has a large meeting room that hosts events ranging from monthly Faculty Senate meetings to small academic conferences to public events such as debates by **UAA's** award winning Seawolf Debate team.

With the growing focus on eLearning, the Consortium Library has also increased its focus on supporting faculty with online resources and services. And this is how I use library resources most often, both in conducting research and in teaching.

My role at **UAA** is primarily as research faculty, and I teach just one to two courses per year. I work at the oldest policy research institute in Alaska, the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), which is located off campus.

Library Support for Research

As a researcher dependent on grant funding, I need to write literature reviews and methods descriptions that include up-to-date peer-reviewed materials. Our library has numerous subscriptions for full text online resources which facilitate this. I regularly use different databases like **Academic Search Premier** and **ProQuest** to search for articles. I also use **Google Scholar** to identify researchers studying topics of interest, and then look for articles by them in the Consortium Library collection. Our librarians have created topic guides to help students and faculty members find resources for their research. I have used the education guide as a good reminder of resources to consult, and have directed my colleagues to those as well.

One of the online resources I often use is **SAGE Research Methods (SRM)**. I've long been a user of **SAGE's** print texts, but when I discovered the **SRM** online database I advocated for our library to bring it to campus. I use this database when I am writing proposals and find methods that I haven't used before, or more up-to-date citations for some of the methods I use regularly.

In my time at **UAA**, the library has also developed a very rapid-response interlibrary loan system for digital and print resources, which has been helpful.

Library Resources for Teaching

Because our student population is geographically spread out, digital access is just as important for resources I use in teaching. The courses I teach are generally focused on research and evaluation methods, some in person and some exclusively online.

I use **SRM** and other online library resources extensively in my teaching, and additionally there are the librarians who provide support. When I teach online, I can ask the subject librarian to join my online course and provide guidance to students on accessing library resources, and to make sure students know they can reach out to her or him. My undergraduate students are generally sophomores, and most will have had a tour of the library the semester before my class, so I rarely bring them to the library. However, I always make sure they know who the support people are in the library, and do my own introduction to **SRM** for them.

I generally advise one honors student a year on his/her honors thesis. The library is of course an invaluable tool for these students, and I will often send them back to **SRM** as they develop their methods, and to meet with the subject librarians for support on literature reviews and guidance on other resources. Students seem to have gotten lazy about proper library search methods as opposed to "googling" everything, and are sometimes surprised that there are so many key documents they miss when they don't use library resources. I am grateful for the support provided by my colleagues in the library.

Growing the Faculty-Library Relationship

Faculty are notoriously bad about reading emails that are not directed to them personally, reaching out to others for help with their research, and changing how we think about research after graduate school. This is something the library faces when trying to serve faculty.

UAA librarians are faculty members, and they have engaged in some innovative collaborations with teaching faculty on subjects such as integrating information literacy into courses and providing resources to educate students about academic honesty and integrity. What's hard is getting lots of faculty to be aware of these resources. I have co-taught several professional development sessions on **SRM** in the library, via our Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence, which is located in the library.

I believe that the only way we will get most faculty to realize what we have in the library is for librarians to "take the library to the faculty," whether by presenting in department meetings, and or holding one on one visits with faculty who have active research agendas. I worry, with the budget constraints facing our university, that our library will lose some valuable resources due to faculty not using them, simply because they are unaware they exist. I do realize this is asking a lot of a library faculty that is stretched thin, but I also believe that the valuable resources they have are not as well-known as they should be.

Iain's Story: A Student Perspective on the Role of the Library

My approach to undergraduate education ballooned from the outset and became a bit unorthodox. Over the course of a five year undergraduate career, I completed distinct bachelor's degrees in the physical sciences (Biological and Natural Sciences) and the humanities (Spanish), associates degrees in Applied Sciences (Fire Science and Health Science) and three minors (History, Justice, and Psychology). My utilization of the library was relatively evenly split between academic courses and

undergraduate research experiences. Both in terms of finding applicable digital journal articles or physical texts and as a physical location to study into consistently late hours, the library served as an invaluable resource for all aspects of my education. When looking for final graduate school options, the library served both as a resource for considering advisors and also as a component that was considered when making a final decision on which school to attend.

During my first semester as a full-time student, I became involved in undergraduate research that necessitated an early introduction to the resources that the library had to offer. My introductory-level courses also required introductory sessions with reference librarians in order to provide students with the groundwork knowledge that would ultimately be an essential component during future courses. These sessions showed me the physical collections available in the facility but also demonstrated effective tips and tricks for utilizing online assets. Perhaps most important, these sessions also highlighted the appropriate ways to use library information, such as citation management tools and identifying potentially undependable journal articles.

When undertaking a project, the library is always my first stop to finding previous literature and formulate research questions. The first individual undergraduate research project that I undertook showed the importance of an effective library catalog and database. The project consisted of a program evaluation of a language immersion program in the local public school district. The program had developed a well-respected reputation but minimal analysis had been conducted on the efficacy of the program and the outcomes of its students specific to language utilization. I was able to demonstrate tangible benefits for the program in addition to providing a snapshot of the foreign language utilization by graduates. While online resources provided an extensive basis for my literature review and the development of my research protocol, the print resources in the library were perhaps most useful as they provided a greater contextual basis for the articles and gave a more elaborate description of research methodologies. I was surprised by the variety of print resources available locally and by the overall value that those sources provided towards my project.

The value of physical print resources seems to vary slightly based on academic disciplines. During my undergraduate studies, I found that print resources seemed to be more relevant to the social sciences and humanities than to the physical sciences. While I often used print resources for groundwork theories in the social sciences or classic texts in the humanities, my peers and I rarely used physical print resources in the physical sciences because that data and research had often been reworked and utilized for today's groundbreaking discoveries.

The physical library facility itself also serves as an integral facet for students and young researchers, such as small group study rooms for working on group projects or studying for final exams. Similarly, small rooms for those involved in webinars or online courses may serve as the only suitable opportunity for some students to effectively participate in distance learning. Appropriate and effective management of these spaces, perhaps extending hours during final exams, is crucial for them to be well-utilized.

As future generations of students increasingly continue to focus on digital assets as the primary means of information, libraries will likely face an increasing burden to demonstrate relevance, particularly for the highly-trained personnel that keep the library running smoothly. The immediate effects of budgetary constrictions are likely to be the most deeply felt as well: reduced hours, fewer online resource subscriptions and limited access to reference librarians. Translating these effects to library users is integral to communicate the importance of the institution for current and future students. The role of faculty in the effective use of the library should also be highlighted. As professional academics, some faculty have demonstrated a strong understanding of the resources a library holds but also how best to utilize those assets. Faculty should strive to share that information with students as a hands-on example of effective outcomes. 🐾

Diane Hirshberg *is Professor of Education Policy at the Institute of Social and Economic Research,* **University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA),** *and director of the* **UAA** *Center for Alaska Education Policy Research. She also serves as Advisor to the* **UAA** *Chancellor on Arctic Research and Education. Her research interests include education policy analysis, indigenous education, circumpolar education issues, and school change. In a past life, she was a user services coordinator at the* **ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges***.*

Iain Miller *recently graduated from the* **University of Alaska Anchorage** *after completing an extensive undergraduate course of study. During his undergraduate studies, Iain was involved with a variety of undergraduate research projects that covered topics from the social and physical sciences. He will be starting a Master's program at the* **University of Alberta** *in the fall with a focus on rural and indigenous healthcare and ultimately plans to attend medical school.*

Endnotes

1. Office of Institutional Research. (2016). *Fact Book 2015-2016.* Anchorage, Alaska: Author, University of Alaska Anchorage. Accessed at *https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/departments/institutional-research/fact-book.cshtml.*

2. UAA Institutional Effectiveness, Engagement, and Academic Support. (2016). *eLearning & Student Success, AY16.* Anchorage, AH: Author, University of Alaska Anchorage. Accessed at *https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/_documents/eLearning%202016%20Report%20with%20SCH%20Table.pdf.*

We give out candy and students stop to talk and often even ask reference questions or book a research appointment. This is a low-stakes way to talk to the students where they are and even if all they come away with is a piece of candy and a reminder that librarians are there to help, it's worth our time. Students begin to see the library as more than just the walls of the building and see librarians as people willing to meet them where they are.

Building Faculty Relationships

As with any relationship, building a rapport with faculty takes time. The more chances you have for interaction, the better. Whether that is in planning your session, providing feedback based on your meetings with students, running into them at a lecture, or simply meeting them for coffee to get their take on how the session went, the more you communicate, the greater the relationship will be.

Communicating back to the faculty as the students come to meet with you will serve several purposes. First, it lets faculty know that their students are taking advantage of the service and makes it more likely they will invite you into their classrooms. Second, it is your chance to provide faculty feedback on assignments. If students are struggling with the assignment, contacting the faculty for clarification can let them know what they need to clarify for everyone and expose some issues they need to fix.

At **Wake Forest**, as we have begun to work with faculty more often, we have seen them bringing us in to help at new phases of the class. We are often asked for input as they craft assignments and in this era of 'fake news' discussions, to develop content around that. The more flexible you are with what you are willing to do, the greater variety of work you will see yourself doing.

Academic librarians are often the touchstones for students throughout the research process, serving roles that range from counselor to detective — from expert to encourager. Throughout it all, our primary goal is to reduce the time students spend on the hunt for good sources in order to maximize the time they can spend on the reading of the sources and the crafting of their arguments. We meet with students in a variety of different environments and assist in a variety of different ways and our hope is that their research projects are the better for it. 🐾