

Finding Community on Campus: HSU Library

Leo R. Kepcke
lrk20@humboldt.edu

Kelly Fortner
kjf278@humboldt.edu

Aaron Laughlin
aaron.laughlin@humboldt.edu

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Recommended Citation

Kepcke, Leo R.; Fortner, Kelly; and Laughlin, Aaron () "Finding Community on Campus: HSU Library," *Redwood Roots Digital Magazine*: Vol. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rr/vol3/iss1/4>

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By Leo Kepcke, Kelly Fortner,
Aaron Laughlin

Finding Community on Campus: HSU Library

Community encompasses so much more than simply referring to the people in one's close proximity. Perhaps it has never been more important to expand our idea of community than it is now. Having spent the last academic year immersed in various virtual settings, finding and building community often seems like a difficult task. The Humboldt State University Library is a vital place to look in order to access resources and participate in community building. Despite the Library's main floors being closed for the fall 2021 semester, the Library continues to house and offer an array of wonderful and impactful virtual community and educational resources, including [research help](#), the [Brain Booth](#), [SkillShops](#), and much more.

According to Victoria Bruner, the Library's Access Services Coordinator, "We promote a sense of access to resources, whether that be by purchasing materials or creating teams of diverse voices—such as students, staff, faculty, and community members. We try to engage with folks who will share what we are doing and who have time and space to also work on the projects collaboratively."

Now more than ever, it is clear that our ideas and practices of community need not solely be confined to the physical spaces we inhabit. While we may still connect with the people physically around us, the virtual community has grown even stronger with the ever increasing connectivity of the world. Kumi Watanabe-Schock, Library Media Coordinator, said, "I think that the community has gotten even larger, because more people can attend book circles and workshops no matter where [they] live." Watanabe-Schock reflected upon the many book circles held by the Library that have drawn peo-

ple from all over the country, and even internationally from France. This accessibility is unprecedented and growing.

There are a myriad of indispensable communities at HSU, but one of the core communities that the Library supports is the academic community. This is achieved by placing the support of the Library towards scholarships, research, and learning—which are also central values of the Library. Cyril Oberlander, Dean of the University Library and an advocate for building strong communities, said, "What an academic community is about is how [people] work side by side in ways that support each other... we're trying to expand everyone's learning, it includes the faculty and the students, so everyone is learning together." This collaborative approach to academics has numerous implications for the future of learning at HSU. "In reality we've done enough distinction building in academics," said Oberlander, "and we need to now bridge the disciplines."

Increasing our capacity for interdisciplinary learning is key to Oberlander's vision for the role that the Library can play in building connections between academic communities. Often, collaborative growth is limited by insular ideas of what is possible, and by facilitating collaborations between various communities, the Library seeks to expand upon the limits of what has been previously accepted and practiced.

At times, we may become transfixed on our own immediate community, and tend to forego outward thought toward the rest of the world. This occurrence is often referred to as the "Redwood Curtain," representing the isolation of extreme northwestern California. As an academic community, it has become increasingly important to remember our ability to affect the world in a greater sense. Oberlander asked a perti-

nent question, “How do we make our classroom learning relevant to the world and useful?” Instead of seeing the challenges presented by the pandemic as insurmountable and inevitably isolating, the Library’s vision is to create possibilities of community in innovative and accessible ways.

One of these community-building measures is the Library’s [Lifelong Learning Lounge \(L4HSU\)](#), which consists of free learning events that are open to, and conducted by, campus and community members. L4HSU has quickly become, as Bruner noted, “A space where community members and students and folks from HSU could get together and learn.” This helps to form a bridge between the university and the broader community. Bruner, who does scheduling for L4HSU, explained how they have incorporated participant feedback to expand and develop this program in community enhancing ways. “Our Lifelong Learning Lounge happened in the summertime and then we got feedback from participants who had come to those virtual events asking for us to continue, so we, for the first time ever, ran L4HSU events during the semester. There were film screenings, there were book discussions, there were speakers from around the US. We partnered with different departments on campus. So I think there’s this very strong line of sharing—sharing information, sharing access.” Bruner’s explanation expands upon the notion that community is more than physical proximity. Community, the kind that the Library is working to build, thrives on participation, communication, and sharing.

In addition to their free learning events, The LifeLong Learning Lounge has also cultivated community by assisting with HSU’s 22nd annual Campus/Community Dialogue on Race (CDOR). This week-long event aims to spark a dialogue about racial injustice, inequality, and oppression, as well as positive strategies for change by hosting workshops and keynote speakers. The development of a welcoming and inclusive community for all is paramount—HSU, along with the Library, is dedicated to that mission. Watanabe-Schock said, “A good example is Equity Arcata, which is a partnership between the city of Arcata, Humboldt State University, local businesses, and members of the community working to make Arcata a more inclusive and welcoming environment for people of color.” These initiatives are very important to HSU, and library affiliates are not only integrally involved in these matters, but are outspoken about them as well.

The HSU Library also coordinates the [Textbooks on Reserve program](#). Bruner, who runs this program explained that it “makes materials that are often very expensive, say \$200 or \$300, accessible for people.” She went on to explain how the Library has increased access to resources in virtual settings: “I also connect with faculty to see what we might be able to purchase in terms of e-books... As we’ve gone to more virtual spaces, one of the Library’s goals is to acquire more virtual content for folks for their classes.” Through the dedicated efforts of those like Bruner, these virtual settings have created opportunities for expansion of accessible resources to support our community. This dedication to providing as many free resources as possible is one of the hallmarks of the HSU Library’s work to increase accessibility for all.

Another hallmark is the Library’s [SkillShops](#), which now include both synchronous and asynchronous offerings. Bruner explained how the Library increased their offerings of asynchronous SkillShops so that students could move through them at their own pace: “Through the pandemic, we started getting together as a community virtually, and librarians and students designed some Canvas SkillShops so people could go at their own pace, because we knew everybody had different access to technology, different bandwidth, attention, and time to put towards projects. We changed how we taught our SkillShops and what we offer to folks and made it something that could be done at your own pace and available on Canvas, which is a platform that most of the student community was already using.”

Bruner emphasized an underlying value and purpose that drives this work when she explained that “the Library facilitates partnerships around campus and the community... [to provide] student-centered workshops that center around personal, professional, and academic growth.” These SkillShops, and the multitude of other library resources available to students, are undoubtedly indispensable towards fostering growth and connection between our academic and personal communities here at HSU.

This centralized hub dedicated to inclusion and access to resources, as well as personal, professional, academic, and community growth, is crucial in HSU’s goal to build strong communities for all. During a time when university life has moved off campus in many ways, it has been challenging for us to develop the same sense of community that we once had. But, as the brilliant and dedicated folks at the Library have helped us to see, perhaps it is not necessarily about returning to the exact world we had before. We can continue to develop new innovations out of the hardship and chaos. Perhaps there is no better opportunity than now to strive for building better, more interconnected, more collaborative, more accessible and inclusive communal realities for all.

*To learn more about the
Library’s many resources visit:*

- [HSU Press](#)
- [Special Collections](#)
- [Brain booth](#)
- [Library Scholar Internships](#)
- [Databases by Discipline](#)
- [Research help](#)
- [Interlibrary loan](#)
- [Campus services](#)
- [SkillShops](#)
- [L4HSU](#)
- [Study spaces](#)
- [Library Staff and Faculty](#)
- [Digital Media Lab](#)
- [HSU Library Blog](#)
- [Library Partners](#)
- [HSU Authors celebration](#)
- [ideaFest](#)
- [Library YouTube channel](#)
- [Resources for students](#)
- [Resources for faculty](#)
- [Resources for staff](#)
- [Resources for community](#)
- [Resources for alumni](#)