Academic Libraries Creating Global Community: Operating Outside of Traditional Roles and Spaces
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Humboldt Journal of Social Relations

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES CREATING GLOBAL COMMUNITY: OPERATING OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL ROLES AND SPACES

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Introduction

Kyle Morgan
Editor-in-Chief, Issue #46

With the hire of a new library dean in 2014, the Cal Poly Humboldt Library embarked on a path of creativity and innovation. This transformation led to an invigoration of community efforts, including:

• The development of an educational summer program titled L4Humboldt to bring together the campus and the community in shared learning experiences. The 2023 program had nearly five hundred participants from the campus and our community.
• The launch of the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt, which now annually publishes over five hundred works of faculty and student authors as well as over one hundred works from community authors and nonprofits.
• The fulfillment of a new sustainability librarian position whose efforts connect the library, campus, and community on impactful works of social justice and environmental stewardship.
• A growing capacity in special collections for the ingest and protection of community digital records as well as the development of a program with the press and discovery services to create historical publications promoting university and community collaborative initiatives.
• Tours to local schools, events on voter education and book-banning topics, and interactions with local schools and nonprofits.
• The transformation of the children’s literature collection with new resources and an improved environment for campus and community families.
• The launch of the Discovery Humboldt project, bringing over fifty million Google Maps views to places and resources around Humboldt County.
• A collaboration with students in the computer science department to develop innovative solutions to informational challenges affecting the community.

These robust outreach efforts have surprised many longtime patrons, who have conceptions of libraries as campus-only centers. However, the view of a campus as independent of its community has never been anything but an illusion. To connect with our communities is to connect our students to real-world opportunities. To uplift our communities is to uplift the places where our students, staff, and faculty live. To sustain our communities is to sustain the environment, society, and politics upon which our campuses stand. To support our communities is to support our future students and advocates. In fact, why do centers for higher education even exist except for the benefit of our communities?

Libraries are frequently viewed through historical perspectives as passively providing information resources to students and faculty, but today’s most innovative college and university libraries have become so much more. When the editorial board issued the call for projects for the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, the librarians of the Cal Poly Humboldt Library jumped at the opportunity to demonstrate this new reality through the lens of community efforts. Our librarian editorial team assembled and edited some of the best of what libraries have been doing so that these under-celebrated community efforts could reach the wider audience they deserve. Thank you to the editorial board for embracing our vision and allowing us to achieve this goal.

Our library editorial team would like to applaud the amazing community efforts of the authors of the seven articles in this journal. Only a little over half of all who inquired or submitted proposals were invited to submit articles, and only half of those made it through the grueling editorial and peer-review process to have their papers published here. To those who did not make it into the publication, we encourage you to continue your work and submit your articles to other journals. You have excellent community projects that deserve to be celebrated by a wider audience.

To those librarians who provided their free time and expertise to assist with peer reviews, our editorial team is
forever grateful. Your dedicated work exemplifies why librarians are some of the most collaborative, innovative, giving, and impactful professionals on the planet.

To those librarians who worked on the editorial team... I bet you did not realize what you had gotten yourself into. This journal was arduous work and yet you persevered and created a journal that is worthy of your efforts. For all our library's passion for connecting with our community, this journal is itself a part of that effort: an honoring of community efforts for the edification of academic and community audiences. Keep up the amazing work and congratulations on what you have accomplished.

And to our readers... I hope you enjoy what has been published here and are inspired to tackle issues beyond your own library walls. And if you want collaborators in that work, reach out to your fellow librarians. I guarantee you will find an ambitious cohort eager to change the world for the better.
Establishing a Museum at Washington State School for the Blind

Robert Schimelpfenig
Washington State University

ABSTRACT
The Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) contains archival collections that document over 100 years of school history and student life. These histories are preserved in scrapbooks, news clippings, photographs, and an assortment of bygone assistive technologies that demonstrate the evolution of blind education and its impact on students. As many of these objects have lingered for years in storage, collections from one of the oldest schools for the blind in the Western United States remain hidden. WSSB and the Washington State University (WSU) Vancouver Library have agreed to work together in partnership to establish a museum and archives. As part of its objective, this partnership aims to extend access and highlight stories from collections to better inform the public of the school’s history and the challenges of blind education. Additionally, the partnership views the museum and archives as a place where blind, low-vision, and sighted students can work together to adopt accessibility standards in the collection environment while gaining skills to prepare them for future careers in museums and archives. This paper discusses the development and progress of this project and how the partnership is setting foundations for community to emerge between students, academics, and the public.

INTRODUCTION
The Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) is one of the oldest schools for blind and low-vision students in the western United States. Because of its more than 100 years of history, the school has accumulated an extensive collection of objects that document the evolution of assistive technologies and changes in student life over the decades. To help bring the stories behind these artifacts to life, the Washington State University (WSU) Vancouver Library, Archives and Special Collections has joined WSSB on its journey to establish a museum and archives to share the relevance of the school’s history with the public. This paper discusses the development and progress of the endeavor through two objectives of the partnership: (1) to promote the collections for the purpose of preserving and highlighting the history of the school; (2) to regard the Donald Donaldson Museum and Archives as a place where both WSSB students and students pursuing archival studies have an opportunity to gain professional knowledge and experience working with historical collections. From these objectives, the partnership envisions an aspirational outcome that will engage the public in understanding accessibility in the history of educating the blind and encourage its improvement in the present and future. Of equal importance, the partnership also conceives the Donaldson Museum and Archives as a means for collaboration and community among sighted, blind, and low-vision students. Its establishment foresees opportunities for sighted students in archival studies to become intimately familiar with accessibility issues while working alongside blind and low-vision students who can acquire applicable skills relevant to a career in museums or archives. Fostering this collaboration serves as an investment toward the necessary changes that must occur in traditional collection environments as more blind and low-vision people utilize archival collections and enter the profession. While the fulfillment of these outcomes is a work in progress, a strong commitment between WSSB and WSU Vancouver Library has already initiated the first steps. Advancing resources, the partnership is setting the foundations for community to develop between students, academics, and the public. In this regard, the project at WSSB will impact the wider museums and archives community through its ability to expand awareness of
needed accessibility practices in the preservation of and access to historical collections.

**WSSB’S BACKGROUND**

The WSSB has a long and storied past driven by a legacy of continuous improvement. Its beginnings take place in 1886, as part of the ill-named Washington School for Defective Youth in Vancouver, Washington. Initially, the school was not equipped for the challenge of blind education. The early version of the school accommodated the deaf and those with mental impairments as well as the blind. When the first blind student enrolled for classes, the school had to solicit donations of books with embossed letters from the Perkins School for the Blind. Educators trained to teach the deaf relied on the materials to teach blind students (Donaldson 1938). It was not until a state law made education compulsory for “defective children” (sic) in 1890 that a teacher with specific training to instruct the blind was assigned to the school (Donaldson 1938:20).

Despite its rocky start, WSSB prevailed. Eventually, the Washington School for Defective Youth dissolved into separate branches. In 1911, WSSB began to resemble the school it is today, dedicated to the learning of students who are blind, deaf-blind, or have low vision. Currently, WSSB provides comprehensive educational programs to over 50 residential students from grades 6 through 12 and provides additional services to 390 students through its outreach programs. Its primary goal is to assist every blind and low-vision student in Washington with the support and services they need to succeed (Washington State School for the Blind 2020).

From academics to vocational studies to creative arts, WSSB has supported student learning while encouraging independence and the fulfillment of dreams for over 135 years. Examples of how the school has shaped the lives of its students can be seen in the careers of notable alumni whose work has had national and international impact. Robert Benjamin Irwin (1883-1951), an early graduate of WSSB, became the first Director of Research and Education for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB). His interest in providing greater access to literature led to the establishment of the famous Talking Books program (Irwin 1955). Others, like Emil Fries (1901-1997), were inspired by the school’s vocational programs. Dedicated to bringing career building skills, Fries established an internationally acclaimed Piano Hospital and Training Center that prepared pupils for occupations in piano tuning and piano maintenance (Donaldson 2006). Some students enriched their lives in the creative arts. Alumni like Diane Schuur (1953-present) received her formal training in music while attending WSSB (Olstrom 2011). She would later maximize her talents as a Grammy Award winning vocalist, electrifying the world of jazz.

**BACKGROUND ON THE MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES**

Traces of these lives and many others are found among the hundreds of objects documenting the history of the school in the Donald Donaldson Museum and Archives1. Occupying space in the school’s former gymnasium, located in the old Administration Building, the Donaldson Museum and Archives was originally inaugurated in 2004. At the time, it was meant to be a permanent exhibit documenting the significant progress of the school. It consisted of rows of wooden bookcases and shelving from the school’s old pantry used to showcase objects in an open storage environment. Items were carefully organized into broad categories in the sequence of a timeline. Scrapbooks and photo albums were left out to open pages for people to thumb through. An assortment of bygone assistive technologies and musical instruments occupied the mid-section of the room, creating a landscape of artifacts that helped to describe an approximate history of the school.

The display enhanced the museum vibe, adding to the school’s popular Sensory Safari, a permanent tactile display featuring taxidermied animals from which students could learn about various creatures through touch and sound2. These spaces became little known but fascinating destinations for guided tours at the school. It was on one of these tours in 2018 that WSU Vancouver Library’s Director, Karen Diller, and Archivist Robert Schimelpfenig first encountered the Donald Donaldson Museum and Archives. Seeing an opportunity for potential collaboration to help preserve and provide wider access to the collections, they

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1 The Donald Donaldson Museum and Archives was named after a former student and principal of WSSB who served as its resident historian. Donaldson was one of the first blind students to enroll in the history program at the University of Washington where he wrote his thesis, *A History of the Washington State School for the Blind* in 1938.

2 The Sensory Safari was installed by the Northwest Chapter of the Safari Club.
joined WSSB’s Superintendent, Scott McCallum, in a plan to revise the space as a center for students and the community to reflect on the unique history of the school.

**WSU VANCOUVER LIBRARY’S PARTNERSHIP BUILDING**

The WSU Vancouver Library’s Archives and Special Collections was established in 2006 to help collect, manage, and document the historical development of WSU’s campus in Southwest Washington. Although its primary focus is to maintain the historical record of the university and its impact on the region, the Archives and Special Collections is outward facing. The mission of the WSU Vancouver Library is to advance the research and learning of all members of the WSU Vancouver community and to serve as an information resource within southwest Washington. As a part of this mission, the Archives and Special Collections establishes partnerships with neighboring historical organizations to promote archival stewardship and assist and provide general access to historical collections through digital projects, exhibits, and public programming. In this way, it has helped to highlight the holdings of local museums and archives and extend access to primary sources for research among students, faculty, and the general public.

The Archives and Special Collections has an extensive track record for building and maintaining successful partnerships. In the last 16 years, it has worked closely with the Clark County Historical Museum to establish a digital program. Taking the lead on a series of grant funded projects, the Archives and Special Collections has helped coordinate the digitization of over 30,000 objects from the museum’s collections (Schimelpfenig 2018). Since 2016, it has developed collaborations with other museums and archives in the region to produce similar outcomes. Digital collections hosted through its website reveal a unique and diverse representation from partner collections entailing records from the local NAACP, World War II identification cards from the Vancouver Barracks Military Association, manuscripts from women’s organizations, and scores of photographs documenting local history.

Aside from expanding collection access, these partnership projects also provide opportunities for students to work in archival environments. Over the years, digital projects have served as a pathway for WSU Vancouver students to gain experience with the care and handling of historical objects and managing digital assets as part of a pursuit toward a career in museums, libraries, or archives. Students who show interest in librarianship are recruited through the Archives and Special Collections to work on grant-based projects as assistants. Among their duties are scanning historical objects, collecting metadata, and organizing the digital assets for inclusion in the WSU Libraries image database, CONTENTdm. Students contribute greatly to the success of such projects, and their presence also helps to raise awareness about the importance of archival practices at host locations. As part of its collaboration, the Archives and Special Collections provides free preservation and digitization workshops to its partners as preparation for project work. The training is open not only to student assistants but also to employees and volunteers. As many of these museums and archives are volunteer-based, such offerings are a welcomed resource to help guide partner organizations toward professional standards.

**WSSB AND WSU VANCOUVER LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP**

The Donald Donaldson Museum and Archives at WSSB is of a much larger scale than any previous project on which WSU Vancouver Library has collaborated. Holdings contain thousands of objects and a diverse assortment of materials. Collections include volumes of the original Talking Books on vinyl records; assistive technologies like Braille writers dating to the 1920s; Braille maps, books, and tools from vocational programs; as well as photographs, scrapbooks, school yearbooks, and other paper records. Adding to this complexity of scope, the Donaldson Museum and Archives was initially established without a plan for long-term care or collections management. Oversight of collections was abandoned long ago, and an adjacent room used for storage was filling up with newly acquired and unprocessed items. Few internal records from its original establishment exist, making it difficult to know what exactly is in the collections and what its connection is to the school. Apart from the curation of a few exhibited items, there is no way to identify where an object came from, how it was used, when it was used, and who was in original possession of it. All of these factors contribute to the challenge of arrangement and overall preservation.

Although the Donaldson Museum and Archives presents a different kind of project, some commonalities make
the WSU Vancouver Library and WSSB suitable partners. Firstly, both are state schools with a similar organizational structure. In terms of collecting, this is reflected in an understanding of how accumulations of historical records and objects are arranged at levels of administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Secondly, both schools are passionate about preserving their history as features in the larger community. Showcasing WSSB’s history to the general public is a way to raise awareness of the school’s mission and is a useful promotional tool for fundraising. Thirdly, both organizations see museums and archives as educational spaces where students can learn about school history while developing skills. These experiences provide important learning opportunities for students interested in pursuing future careers in archives, museums, and/or libraries. Finally, as a new and developing repository, the WSU Vancouver Library, Archives and Special Collections has experience building a school archive from the ground up. Therefore, the WSU Vancouver Library has insight into the fundamental functions, policies, procedures, and training needed to establish a successful repository that it can share with WSSB.

In terms of an overall vision, the partnership’s first objective is to promote collections to preserve and highlight the history of the school and affirm WSSB’s role in the region as a key institution that has provided services to the blind since the 1880s. In this respect, the partnership envisions the Museum and Archives as an educational center that brings the question of accessibility to the forefront. Its collections offer a unique look at the history of how blind students were viewed and the evolution of blind education with selections of bygone assistive technologies that provide opportunities to learn about different tactile and auditory mediums historically used by students at the school. The partnership believes that sharing this history with the general public through exhibits, programs, and digital projects will further an understanding of education for blind and low-vision students, promote WSSB’s mission, and garner support for the school and the services it provides. Making such collections available for research at the university level will also further the discovery of contents and can broaden or challenge existing historical narratives about blindness. Specifically, the collections offer insights into the everyday activities of students showing unique accomplishments, adversities, and joy. From vocational studies and academics to recreation and athletics, the collections reveal an array of learning through which students engage society through inclusive roles. In this respect, the common exclusionary tropes used to support some historical narratives about blindness as a seed of genius, captured in the image of the blind artist, or a seed of despair, captured in the image of the blind beggar, are challenged (Witek 1988).

Integration of contents from the Donaldson Museum and Archives into the school’s curriculum may entice students to learn more about WSSB’s history and the lives of its former students and faculty. The introduction of archival objects in the classroom could aid in student reflection and discussion concerning the technologies and techniques used to teach blind students. Sharing such a curriculum with other public schools in the region would further raise awareness of past challenges to improve accessibility at present and in the future.

Another objective of the partnership is to make the Donaldson Museum and Archives a place where both WSSB students and university students pursuing archival studies have an opportunity to gain professional knowledge and experience working with historical collections. In this regard, the Donaldson Museum and Archives is perceived as a kind of laboratory or training ground for students to learn basic skills within the archival environment. As mentioned previously, the Archives and Special Collections at WSU Vancouver Library approaches many of its partnership projects as opportunities for students to gain experience working in museums and archives. Such projects help to advance the interests of students on their journey to become future archivists, collection managers, or curators. Generally, students are exposed to archival practices by assisting with arrangement and description and building digital collections and exhibits, among other tasks. Past projects have served as a good introduction to traditional archiving and museum work from which students have later found success toward careers in libraries, archives, or museums.

Nevertheless, the Donaldson Museum and Archives present an additional challenge and opportunity to students apart from traditional archiving. Because the school and its collections are a basis for the education of the blind, the Donaldson Museum and Archives require developing accessibility standards for archival materials so they can be used by those who are blind or with low vision. As such, the partnership envisions a unique collaboration among WSSB students, WSU Vancouver undergraduates, and graduate
Establishing a Museum

students from a Portland, Oregon branch of Emporia State University’s School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) who are interested in gaining experience in the archival environment while adapting practices to accessibility needs. In this regard, the Donaldson Museum and Archives is a project that is in part by, for, and of the blind.

For WSSB, the inclusion of its students is a commitment towards its legacy of continuous improvement whereby the exposure to skills in the archival environment can potentially lead to opportunities in a profession not traditionally open to those who are blind or with low vision. From the perspective of the WSU Vancouver Library, advancing emphasis on accessibility in the archives is a partial fulfillment of its commitment to building a culture of diversity and equity (Washington State University Vancouver Library 2021). The project encourages this culture through the development of awareness and expertise on the accessibility of archival materials, which will help prepare students to approach museums and archives as inclusive spaces where archivists must be responsive to the different ways people use and need to have access to archival materials. Of significance, the project is a pathway for students to gain professional knowledge with the expectation that the collection environment must be accessible for those who not only use the collections but also work in museums and archives.

THE FIRST STEPS

Recognizing that the formal establishment of a museum requires significant planning, the new partnership began by first identifying priorities in the existing collection environment. Since the initial creation of the Donaldson Museum and Archives had an absence of preservation planning, this became a core priority around which the rest of the project would develop. To assist in this guidance, WSU Vancouver Library and WSSB collaborated on a National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) Preservation Assistance Grant (PAG). The PAG serves as an extraordinary resource for smaller collecting organizations that need help with preservation planning, supplies, and training (National Endowment of the Humanities 2023). In this regard, with a grant awarded in 2019, the partnership used the funding to hire a preservation specialist from the Northeastern Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) to perform a preservation pre-assessment.

Interfacing with a preservation specialist helped to highlight many practical concerns relating to environmental controls, storage, and collection policies. Recommendations for abandoning the open storage model forced emphasis away from the sole purpose of exhibiting objects and toward the need for new archival procedures, intellectual controls, developing a plan for staffing, and preservation training. The mounting list of priorities revealed a need for a more hands-on approach with oversight and guidance on collections care and internal operations. In the final assessment, the project was framed as a multiyear commitment entailing unknown amounts of resources for supplies and personnel.

Although the amount of work ahead appears overwhelming, the process of discovering what it will take to formally establish a museum and archives at WSSB has helped to illuminate the ultimate outcomes the partnership hopes to achieve. By bringing these primary objectives into focus, the project is sustained by a mutual vision that orients the priorities of the Donaldson Museum and Archives around learning opportunities for the larger community, students, and all participating parties.

PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT

The partnership recognizes that its vision and its objectives are aspirational. Before many of the project’s outcomes can be realized, there are foundational steps that must first be completed. In reflection of the Donaldson Museum and Archives preservation pre-assessment, the partnership has developed a multi-year plan that emphasizes establishing policies, collections care, and gaining intellectual control. As the plan outlines, the early years of the project will develop a robust inventory and accessions scheme in tandem with new arrangements for storage and the implementation of preservation practices. Following this first phase, the project turns to community engagement and access through the development of a digitization program and an exhibits program. In preparation for the initial phase of the project, the partnership has drafted an organizational structure for the Donaldson Museum and Archives. This entails WSSB’s Superintendent as director, WSU Vancouver’s Archivist as the project facilitator and consultant, and a collections

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3 WSU Vancouver Library has a long relationship with Emporia State University’s School of Library and Information Management (SLIM). As WSU Vancouver does not have a graduate program in library science, many librarians have taught as adjuncts in SLIM and have recruited students for projects and internships.
manager who is primarily responsible for carrying out all archival duties and supervising volunteers and students.

WSSB’s Superintendent has dedicated funding to support a part-time collections manager position. The role assures progress and the longevity of the project with documented procedures that will help establish the continuation of archival standards and preservation practices for years to come. This position is a one-year appointment meant to introduce a graduate student to archives work. While collaborating with WSU Vancouver Library’s Archivist, facilitating the development of the Donaldson Museum and Archives from the ground up, the collections manager position offers a unique learning opportunity that not only introduces a student to the profession through basic archival functions but also decision-making processes concerning the arrangement, description, and storage of collections. The WSU Vancouver Library assists with the recruitment of graduate students for this position through its relationship with Emporia State University’s SLIM program.

In 2020, the partnership collaborated once more on an NEH PAG to acquire additional funding for furniture, archival enclosures, and preservation training in support of the position. Although funding was awarded, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly forced a suspension of operations at the school, limiting access to the Museum and Archives and delaying the project for almost a year and a half. During this disruption, the partnership was still able to coordinate some activities, including the dismantling of the open storage environment and expanding the range of shelving for storage. Nevertheless, it was not until the Fall of 2021 that the first collections manager was hired, and the project could resume.

The disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic was a setback. Yet, it did not deter the commitment of the partnership or its plan. In the Winter of 2022, the first volunteer for the project was recruited to assist the collections manager with categorizing objects and collecting inventories. Preservation workshops through NEDCC provided the project team with additional training on collections care and handling, and WSSB dedicated further funding for archival supplies to ensure appropriate storage of objects.

While the implementation of these foundational steps continues, the project has begun to address the primary objectives of the partnership’s vision. To make the progress of the Donaldson Museum and Archives more visible to the public, WSU Vancouver Library’s Archivist and WSSB’s collections manager co-presented a paper at the 2022 Washington Museum Association’s annual conference. The presentation provided an overall history of the project and shared selected images of assistive technologies from collections in preparation for an exhibit on the history of education at WSSB. The conference session contributed to an overall discussion among museum professionals on ways to think about accessibility for the blind in displays and exhibits.

Following this conference, a small exhibit titled “A Short History of Assistive Technologies at the Washington State School for the Blind” was assembled at the WSU Vancouver Library (Washington State University Vancouver 2022). The exhibit corresponded with October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month and promoted assistive technologies that have advanced student learning at WSSB. Occupying nine display cases, the exhibit followed the evolution of technological developments used by students to gain vocational skills. The display was meant to educate the public on the extraordinary effort students pursue to communicate with the world at large and encourage reflection on the challenges to improve accessibility. Display cases featured items like the traditional Braille slate and stylus, which requires a user to write in Braille from right to left and in reverse order for the raised dots to be read correctly. Other items like the refreshable Braille display demonstrate current technologies used by students to interface with the internet and for electronic communications. The exhibit served as a first effort to introduce the campus community and the general public to objects from the Donaldson Museum and Archives collections and included a 40-page Braille exhibit guide. An adaptation of the exhibit installation for campus tours at WSSB is planned for the coming year.

Since the launch of the exhibit, other efforts to engage students and the public have continued. Currently, librarians from WSU are planning a pop-up exhibit at WSSB that will detail the history and use of tactile print in reflection of advancing literacy for the blind and those with low vision. Exploring early alternatives to the uniform Braille code through an interactive display, students will be able to sample competing styles of embossed lettering, including Boston Line Type and Moon Type, as well as have an opportunity to judge the usability and efficiency of such
tactile systems. In the context of the notable WSSB alumnus Robert Benjamin Irwin’s famous work on the “War of the Dots,” the exhibit will illuminate the historical challenges to arrive at the uniform Braille code (Irwin 1955:25). Although this display is forthcoming, WSSB has expressed interest in adapting the pop-up exhibit as a permanent source for students to learn about the history of tactile print systems, literacy, and its overall place in the history of blind education.

The second objective in the partnership’s vision has proved more challenging. With the project delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, creating the Donaldson Museum and Archives as a laboratory for WSU Vancouver students and WSSB students to learn archival practices was waylaid over the last year while inventories and basic procedures for processing collections were developed. As the collections manager establishes a clearer understanding of the context of objects and disseminates a plan for arranging and describing collections, the Donaldson Museum and Archives will become a more amenable place for integrating and directing student work. Currently, in this early stage of the project, student involvement is being discussed as an opportunity to develop accessibility standards in the archival workflow. In this respect, work assignments are expected to parity arranging and description procedures. The students can therefore learn about the different levels of information collected by museums and archives while furthering ways the content can be accessed in the physical space of the collection environment.

The work assignments planned for interested WSSB students include transposing Braille coding on boxes, folders, and identification cards for photographs. This task introduces the student to the basic arrangement of collections while involving them with item-level descriptions. Working alongside the collections manager, the student transcribes and adheres collection identifiers in Braille to boxes and folders in parity with existing handwritten information. At the item level, the student then works with the collections manager to include information documenting each photograph while including a concise description of the image content. The description is encoded in Braille on an acid-free identification card kept within the envelope or enclosure of the photograph. As a detail of accessibility, the development of the identification cards will assure blind students have access to the content of the photograph.

Although the task seems rudimentary, it serves as an introduction and a good training opportunity for students who are just starting to learn about the organization of collections. Other advanced work could be introduced once a student learns basic routines of arrangement and description. For instance, those students who can read Braille can assist with developing catalog records for books in the collections. While Braille books contain some publication information for sighted readers, substantive information like abstracts and other descriptions are left undeveloped. Additionally, several locally produced softcover books are not accessible to sighted readers at all. In learning to fill out bibliographic record forms for such items, the students can help further reveal the contents of books in the Donaldson Museum and Archives.

Advancing in the collections work, students can also assist with descriptions of bygone assistive technologies. These objects include early versions of Braille writers, typewriters, early electronic Braille readers like the 1980s VersaBraille system, and the 1990s text-to-speech Kurzweil reader. Students can add simple tactile descriptions of such objects or details on how the device works. Nevertheless, as many of the assistive technologies are obsolete and were used by such a small number of the population, the real value comes through student research on the development of the technology and its historical use. The task will therefore, require a student who is comfortable with retrieving content from the internet or other electronic resources from which they produce a short history of the object. This more advanced work, which amounts to the beginnings of object curation for future exhibits and displays, will likely be suitable for a student who has already spent significant time in the Donaldson Museum and Archives learning about levels of description.

A loftier work assignment for students involves the development of QR-generated codes that are linked for access to mp3 files containing audio for archival descriptions of items. In this assignment, the collections manager collaborates with the student to collect information at the box, folder, and item-level which is then recorded as an audio description to a recording device. Each description is saved as an electronic audio file and stored on a local server, which is then accessed through a URL. With internet links to these audio files, unique QR codes can then be produced for each item. These can then be printed onto labels and adhered to
the respective boxes, folders, or items. When scanned with a QR code reader on a phone or other mobile device, the audio file will play with the relevant information at the desired description level. Although this idea is untested, the current usage of mobile devices and QR codes by WSSB students will likely make this assignment amenable to various kinds of work in the Donaldson Museum and Archives.

As work assignments for students are being developed, the first high school-aged WSSB student is expected to be employed as an assistant to the collections manager this autumn. The student will join a new round of volunteers, and over the course of the year, the WSU Vancouver Library’s Archivist will look to recruit interested undergraduate students. As the project proceeds, the Donaldson Museum and Archives will begin to resemble the educational center the partnership envisions.

**CONCLUSION**

Establishing the Donaldson Museum and Archives at WSSB is an investment toward preserving the past while advancing new opportunities for the future. As the partnership between the WSU Vancouver Library and WSSB continues, a vision and commitment of resources will contribute to manifesting a museum and archives that is not just a static repository but a central location where awareness of the role of accessibility is elevated. Through the development of exhibits and other programming, the Museum and Archives bring forth a great potential for community engagement. Unearthing WSSB’s long history of educating the blind, the progress and challenges of improving the lives of students through technology and other means become points of interest, reflection, and discussion not likely or previously explored by the general public. While access to such content comes to light, the work within the Donaldson Museum and Archives becomes a testament to WSSB’s continuous improvement. Setting these foundations, WSSB students can learn to utilize and work in the Museum and Archives to help advance accessibility measures in tandem with traditional archival practices. Working alongside graduate students and WSU Vancouver undergraduates, the collaboration encourages a future orientation for museums and archives. As students bring new expectations for accessibility to the archives profession, their contributions will wield an impact on the museum and archival practices at large. In this respect, the project at WSSB contributes to the potential for progress and change in the wider museum and archives community.

**REFERENCES**


Looking at the Past to Change the Future: Showcasing Featured Collections, Building Communities, and Co-creating

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have the opportunity and the responsibility to promote and advance content that creates transformative and iterative learning opportunities. To that end, and in an effort to build communities and facilitate co-creation, Portland State University showcases three main Featured Collections in our open access repository, PDXScholar: Climate Justice, COVID-19, and Racial and Gender Equity, with a fourth pilot collection—Student Work: An Open Showcase of Outstanding Student-Created Research & Creative Work—under development. The collections include a broad range of audiovisual materials, such as podcasts and webinar series, as well as sustainability and equity work, student-created content, and numerous future-focused multidisciplinary counter stories. By showcasing interdisciplinary projects and minority faculty scholarship, we provide a platform that helps elucidate complex problems like climate change, public health challenges, systemic racism, and student retention from a range of perspectives. Our Featured Collections program provides an example of how institutional repositories might be reorganized to spark ideas, ignite discoveries, and accelerate change.

“Bad libraries only build collections. Good libraries build services (and a collection is only one of many). Great libraries build communities.”
BACKGROUND

About PDXScholar

PDXScholar makes the research and creative works of Portland State University faculty, staff, and students easily discoverable and available to anyone, anywhere in the world. Our mission is to support scholarship, promote research and cross-disciplinary collaboration, provide access to digital instructional materials created by the PSU community, and record the history of the university. PDXScholar is a platform for open-access textbooks, open-access course materials, open-access journals, and conference proceedings; student projects, posters, capstones, theses, and dissertations; published scholarly articles by PSU faculty, staff, and students; as well as creative works, webinars, video/audio interviews, and historical archives. The platform includes about 35,000 PSU-produced or sponsored articles, presentations, videos, post-prints, and other works that have been downloaded over 15 million times.

Repository Vision

• Increase citation impact
• Support unlimited file types
• Facilitate co-creation and showcase research impacting our communities
• Promote and support open access where possible
• Support journal publishing to enhance student participation in the knowledge cycle
• Save students money through the creation and publication of open-access textbooks
• Support the university’s mission to lead the way to an equitable and sustainable future

The Promise of Featured Collections

In 2020, we launched PSU’s Featured Collections page with the goal of helping researchers come together to find solutions to complex problems like COVID-19, climate change, and social justice. Although the project was underway before the onset of the pandemic, during lockdown, we pushed this program forward to make these topics more visible and promote the repository as a place for community and co-creation. To better encapsulate the program’s mission, we also linked the collections thematically through the use of color, typeface, and stylistic design. The Climate Justice Collection was represented by a fist holding a flower over the Digital Commons global readership map; the Equity Collection was represented by the black-and-white image of Beatrice Morrow Cannady, noted civil rights activist and founder of the NAACP; and the COVID-19 collection was represented by an image of the virus. Branding these collections with iconography and promoting them on Instagram and other social media platforms increased visibility of the repository and strengthened our roles as change agents.

As equity work flourished during the pandemic, we adapted to capture a range of content producers and modalities. We made it our goal to include the many works that were coming from the PSU President’s Office, Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and School of Gender, Race, and Nations. As scholars shifted modalities to stay connected, we added the audiovisual content that they were presenting on social media, podcasts such as PDXPLORES, and National Public Radio. The process of creating Featured Collections was iterative, with more content fueling more content identification, uncovering more opportunities for cross-indexing, and eliciting new ways to discover research topics. For example, we cross-indexed the Houselessness Roundtable, which is part of the newly reinvigorated Portland Center for the Humanities, a collaboration between Street Roots, a community advocacy group and alternative newspaper; Comics Studies; FFF Studies; Architecture; Urban Studies; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and the Homelessness Research and Action Collaborative.

Showcasing events by elevating and amplifying their scholarly output has great promise to exponentially increase awareness and future engagement with these important topics, hopefully giving rise to more events and more collaborations. An example is the climate symposium that was seeded by former PSU President Percy—Creating a Just Climate Future: A Community Dialogue. Paired with PSU’s 15th Annual Sustainability Celebration, the event “brought together staff members from community organizations, regional and local climate policy leaders, and student activists from PSU and Portland Community College to discuss their priorities and explore how PSU can aid and elevate the efforts of those working directly on this important issue” (Percy et al. 2022). The event recording, cross-indexed in both the
Equity and Climate Justice collections, involved several city, county, and nonprofit agencies setting plans in motion. This type of cross-functional, multiracial, and interdisciplinary effort has the promise to inspire new ideas in unexpected ways, engaging evolving audiences in creating solutions to complex and evolving problems.

Addressing equity issues becomes much more relevant when our constituents—our readers, listeners, and viewers—are directly facing inequities. Research shows that a large number of PSU students have faced homelessness, food insecurity, undocumented status, or previous incarceration (Greene 2023; Arthur 2019). Featured Collections offer students online communities where their issues are being addressed, where they can contribute content, and where they can more readily engage in the knowledge cycle. The hope is that showcasing collaborative and student-led social justice projects may provide a welcoming venue, which may lead to more involvement, increase co-creation, bolster participation and discovery, and potentially increase enrollment, retention, and graduation. Such engagement where subjects participate in the research has the promise of advancing the breakdown of systemic inequality and fostering transformative change.

“To not prioritize the public reach and impact of new knowledge concentrates academic resources among an elite and ignores the injustices experienced especially in marginalized communities that are, too often, just the ones ‘studied’” (Reyes Mason 2020). By including all participants and showcasing diverse voices, we are helping to recruit diverse students at a critical time when enrollment declines are one of the central concerns in higher education. Given the complex societal issues we showcase in the Featured Collections, the threat of an enrollment cliff, and concerns that academia reinforces inequalities, we hope to shift toward new analyses of the past that reveal counter stories and nontraditional futurisms. This model allows prospective students to see what kind of place we can be—a place that provides global open access, a place that invites and encourages co-creation, a place that welcomes change where students are active participants in propelling change. Student recruitment and retention can be bolstered if we foster thriving online communities and build tools, sites, events, and scenarios where we facilitate relevant learning opportunities.

At PSU, we have been fortunate to hire Black, Indigenous, Latinx, nonbinary, and other minorities who relate their counter stories and offer culturally relevant coursework. The Racial and Gender Equity Collection includes works from faculty representing interdisciplinary topics, such as “Indigenous Futurism,” a term coined by Grace Dillon, a faculty member in Indigenous Studies; works about Afrofuturism by Walidah Imarisha, Director of the Center for Black Studies and Assistant Professor in the Black Studies Department; and many other counter stories, such as those told by Martín Alberto Gonzalez, assistant professor in Chicano Latino Studies who calls himself a Hope Dealer and creates coloring books, stickers, hats, buttons, and audiovisual materials to reach popular audiences. Through our platform, diverse students can find these mentors, engage in lifelong learning, capture content critical to meaningful learning, and participate in solving complex problems facing global communities.

Collection Descriptions

Climate Justice Collection
This collection collocates research generated by the Portland State University community, addressing complex climate change problems by recognizing that social justice and climate change are intertwined.

Coronavirus Disease Research - COVID-19
This collection showcases journal articles, preprints, and other publications and presentations about the Coronavirus COVID-19 by faculty and researchers at Portland State University.

Racial and Gender Equity Collection
This collection brings together research generated by the Portland State University community that is centered on the issues of racial justice, gender equity, and related topics.

Student Work: An Open Showcase of Outstanding Student-Created Research & Creative Work
This open access collection of exemplary graduate and undergraduate work includes nearly forty sub-collections: award-winning capstone projects, faculty-mentored research, peer-reviewed scholarship, theses, dissertations,
research projects, posters, presentations, articles, and more. Student work comprises one third of PDXScholar, represents 60% of PDXScholar downloads, and has been downloaded nearly ten million times.

**Featured Collections Goals**

- Center traditionally marginalized content creators
- Highlight the humanities by showcasing hidden gems
- Create visually appealing resources using thumbnail graphics
- Improve departmental, faculty, and student engagement with the Library
- Provide one bucket, similar to having a landing page for open access textbooks
- Co-locate interdisciplinary topics like food insecurity and emergency preparedness
- Foster cross-disciplinary collaboration; facilitate the co-creation of original research
- Support the university's mission to lead the way to an equitable and sustainable future

**TECHNICAL OVERVIEW**

We developed Featured Collections using three criteria. Collections should be (1) current, (2) popular, and (3) resonant, as demonstrated by well-known sources that compile trend research, such as Pew, Wired, Gartner, and Google Trends. We recognize that the COVID-19 collection will not always be a Featured Collection and plan to replace it with a collection that better meets our criteria. Links to Featured Collections can remain viable in perpetuity, regardless of whether or not the links are displayed on the Featured Collections landing page.

Featured Collections offer visual appeal, usage data, and search functionality. The collections are built with the Digital Commons automatic collection tool with nothing manually added to these collections. The content is filtered to the landing pages through the use of queries similar to using advanced search functionality. Climate, COVID-19, and Equity collections were built using Library of Congress subject terms and then tagged to cross-index. Some expansion was required to ensure that we were capturing words in abstracts, filtering particular collections, accounting for the fact that different staff used different subject terms, and being mindful that the future of subjects/keywords is a moving target. For example, Environmental racism is an official Library of Congress subject heading; however, no staff member had ever tagged content with that phrase to date, even though there are works in the repository that could be classified by that subject. The Student Work pilot is different in that it was built using filters that consolidate sub-collections of student work, as opposed to the other Featured Collections that use topical filters to pull content from across the entire repository.

The content was already tagged before the idea of creating Featured Collections. We had used Library of Congress subject headings consistently since the start of the repository. There was some level of trial and error at first, checking to see what results were produced when testing particular words or phrases, and then the filters were refined. Occasionally, individual item records needed to be corrected to make sure the content was displayed in the correct collection. In one case, the phrase Minority librarians needed to be added to a record because the original cataloger did not use that subject phrase, although it was the most appropriate.

The process has been evolving, but the initial setup was fairly quick. It did not take more than a week of tinkering to get the basic filters in place. To make it simple for future content additions, staff were instructed to use three main tags as a quick way to ensure new work would be included. For the Climate Justice Collection, staff used the subject phrase “Climatic changes”; for the COVID-19 Collection, staff used “Coronavirus Disease Research - COVID-19”; and for the Equity Collection, staff used “Social justice,” although a number of other subjects will also pull content into this collection. Numerous subject terms were included at the outset in an attempt to be exhaustive and capture all appropriate existing content. New filters are added rarely now, and it is easy to alter the set of filters to make sure content is captured.

The COVID-19 collection used the abstract, keyword (subject terms in our repository), and title fields. The Climate Justice Collection was a bit tricky because we were trying to capture a sociopolitical issue related to environmental research, so we used fewer filters in order to ensure we were only including works that would most clearly fall under that category. The Equity Collection was
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the most expansive collection because we needed to capture many topics that were not necessarily described by the single phrase “Social justice.” We welcome feedback to improve our system, acknowledging that Library of Congress subject headings, like any thesaurus, can be criticized as inherently biased, and some level of cataloger bias will be inherent to any system. We also occasionally strayed from Library of Congress subjects and used filters representing keyword phrases that researchers themselves used, such as “People of color” because we wanted to capture the full range of content and cast a wider net. See Appendix B for the complete list of filters being used as of January 2024.

The project is in its fourth year, and there are minimal costs, although staff time is required to regularly assess, tweak, and promote the project. Once set up, very little staff time is required to maintain the service. The automated filters are fine-tuned. The work that goes into adding subjects to item records is part of existing staff costs, and for this reason, there is no additional cost, although we might be able to do a more thorough investigation to ensure that we are capturing older content.

Marketing campaigns can be replicated easily with new examples. We added a field to our Google submission form: “Please note if your work should be cross-indexed in one of our Featured Collections—Climate Justice, COVID-19 Disease Research, Racial and Gender Equity—or listed in another department, for example: Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Indigenous Nations Studies, Chicano/ Latino Studies, Black Studies, etc.” In this way, we are involving users in the cross-indexing process and promoting the collections and departmental landing pages at the same time. The promotion seems to working as more faculty in smaller departments like Indigenous Nations Studies are requesting cross-indexing when sending us their work. We also added links to Featured Collections throughout PDXScholar in the introductory text of related collections. Additionally, Featured Collections and subsets of those collections, such as student work focused on environmental justice, are regularly promoted on the Library blog and via social media.

One question that we faced was how to respond to new featured collection requests. We were approached by faculty requesting an HSI-focused collection to support campus efforts to obtain Hispanic Serving Institution status. In this case, we said no and explained our concerns: understaffing, collection size (small subset), and precedence-setting. Anticipating this type of question and how to respond is important. Having clear criteria and being able to articulate the criteria helps support decisions.

**ANALYSIS AND IMPACT**

The use-cases with scope-specific discovery are remarkable. Because each initial search of a Featured Collection provides an initial set of records, and the pages include search boxes, users can drill down for a topic within each collection, and then narrow those results by facets such as discipline, keyword (subject), year, publication, publication type, or file type. The scopes provide access to a targeted subset of records that can be searched in more nuanced ways with more targeted strategies, offering an incredibly robust discovery tool. Many unique connections, complex topical discoveries, and novel research ideas would not have been as easily discovered if we had relied solely on the main repository’s advanced search feature, needing dozens of lines of search strategies to mimic the discovery capabilities.

The practical takeaways from developing Featured Collections have been an increased awareness of these topics and connected works, increased engagement with the PSU community, alignment with administration goals, and increased usage. The Equity collection has well over two million cumulative downloads, equating to nearly sixteen percent of site downloads, with over 328,000 downloads in 2023. The Climate Justice collection is one of the top ten collections, with over 35,000 downloads in 2023. The COVID-19 collection had over 28,000 downloads in 2023, ranking just outside of our top ten. We can see both qualitatively and quantitatively that Featured Collections are changing the scholarly record by lifting up marginalized voices. We see this anecdotally in the fact that users flag content to be added to the Featured Collections on our submission form and via email requests, and we see this with data collected from statistical analyses. Currently, we have an observational understanding of how the collections are being used. The Climate Justice collection was cited on the former PSU President’s webpage, numerous users have given positive feedback, and analytics show several hundred referrals to Featured Collections from Instagram posts.
Table 1. Digital Commons Full Text Downloads 2023-01-01 through 2023-12-05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Downloads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Gender Equity Collection</td>
<td>328,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Justice Collection</td>
<td>35,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Collection</td>
<td>28,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Studies</td>
<td>4,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
<td>2,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Nations Studies</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano/Latino Studies</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Google Analytics Pageviews 2023-01-01 through 2023-12-05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landing Page</th>
<th>Pageviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Featured Collections Main</td>
<td>931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Justice Collection</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Gender Equity Collection</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covid-19 Collection</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Studies</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Nations Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicano/Latino Studies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By comparing usage data of the departmental landing pages and the Featured Collections, we can see the impact more clearly. Data shows that content accessed from underrepresented departments have significantly fewer downloads than Featured Collections. We can extrapolate that the Featured Collections are effectively raising visibility. Although in general, discovery by search engines is more likely than discovery by browsing, links to Featured Collections in the main site navigation and on our homepage are being clicked, and the co-located content is evidently increasing usage. Analytics show significant traffic to Featured Collections from Instagram posts, but the download data is far more resounding.

The School of Gender, Race, and Nations (SGRN) is comprised of four departments: Black Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Indigenous Nations Studies, and Chicano/Latino Studies. Google Analytics identified that only the Black Studies landing page had any web traffic, and the other departments received absolutely no pageviews in the prior two years. The combined cumulative downloads for SGRN were only sixty-nine thousand, whereas the Equity collection alone has well over two million downloads. Even if we multiply the number of items by the number of downloads, 323 items to 69,655 downloads for SGRN, and 3,519 items to 2,018,529 downloads for the Equity collection, it is evident that the promotion of the Equity collection through social media, word of mouth, prominent links, and search engine optimization is far more effective at reaching global audiences.

Google Analytics 4 (GA4) launched in 2023, and their data variance from prior years is questionable, but with some skepticism, we present that data. In two prior years, there were zero pageviews for Chicano/Latino Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

To reiterate, statistics cannot clearly differentiate points of access and discovery or provide an airtight case that we are fostering cross-disciplinary research. That said, we have seen numerous examples of collaborative research that indicate there is a correlation between research and the institutional repository as a source for transformative and iterative learning. We are seeing many cross-indexing requests, consistent positive user feedback, and increasing usage and popularity
Looking at the Past to Change the Future

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”
– Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)

An ongoing debate over the relevance of the humanities, learning for the sake of learning, and the efficacy of higher education—with a chief complaint that students are churned out unprepared for real jobs—has left many of us pondering our collective future, particularly in light of equity and climate challenges. One of the more nebulous issues with these criticisms is the hegemony or the hierarchical structure that remains in place despite widespread recognition that the pandemic brought inequality to the forefront of the news, making it a topic for the dinner table as well as boardrooms and classrooms. Stanley Fish (2009), reviewing his student’s book *The Last Professor*, talks about the “irrelevance of humanist inquiry for its own sake,” arguing that “higher education, properly understood, is distinguished by the absence of a direct and designed relationship between its activities and measurable effects in the world” (Fish 2009). If higher education is to be relevant in the real world, higher education and learning must mean something to people everywhere, not just academics. It has to address injustice by lifting up the voices of those who have long been subjects rather than co-creators.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1978) discusses how higher education serves as a “mechanism of domination” (p. 55). Furthermore, according to a recent article in...
Figure 2: The bar graph shows the campus repository’s all-time downloads and items, reflecting that the Student Work collection and the Equity collection are by far the most popular content in the repository.

The Atlantic by Evan Mandery, author of *Poison Ivy: How Elite Colleges Divide Us*, “[v]irtually every evaluative mechanism in the academy—peer review of scholarly articles and grant applications, grading, and tenure evaluation—purports to be objective and is supremely hierarchical” (Mandery 2022). Mandery cites famed economist Malcolm Gladwell and Mitchell Stevens, author of *Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites*, pointing out that “elite colleges simultaneously reproduce class inequality and belief in the justness of that inequality” (Mandery 2022).

Something deeper is going on. Why do faculty speak so differently about things that happen in their house as opposed to everyone else’s? Understanding this dynamic might help us begin to answer the question at the root of the inequities in American higher education: How can a system run by liberals be so conservative? (Mandery 2022)

Featured Collections address this conundrum. Rather than reproducing and reinforcing elite beliefs, the collections put social justice issues at the forefront, making diverse voices and alternative futures more readily discoverable, showcasing perspectives of the traditionally oppressed, and creating a springboard for traditionally marginalized researchers—opening opportunities for researchers to pioneer new ways to engage in developing alternative futures as co-creators and change agents.

Featured Collections represent a new approach to solving complex problems or, rather, solving the right problems. In a poignant article from Harvard Business Review, “Are You Solving the Right Problems?” the problems originally identified as the slow-moving elevator and pet overpopulation are *solved* by taking another approach and spending more time looking at the actual problems (Wedell-Wedellsborg 2017). The slow elevator is not so much the problem as the user experience of the wait for it, so installing a disco ball
may be a viable solution. The pet overpopulation problem has more to do with the fact that pet owners often need to surrender their pets when moving because many rentals do not allow pets, so an intervention program to address housing policies can change the dynamics to correct the actual problem. With the complexities of inequity, climate justice, declining enrollment, and waning humanities programs, it is useful to ask ourselves: What problem are we actually trying to solve? This approach is similar to the problem-solving method often attributed to Einstein: “If I had only one hour to save the world, I would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem, and only five minutes finding the solution” (Quote Investigator 2014).

Discoveries often come when least expected, in contexts outside of the original problem. In his Parade Magazine article “Where Did TV Come From? The Scientist Who Accidentally Invented Pop Culture,” Carl Sagan investigates Maxwell, a physicist whose equations and experiments laid the groundwork for modern communication when he discovered that “electricity and magnetism join together to become light” (Sagan 1995:10). According to Sagan, “Maxwell wasn’t after any of this,” although his work, and the work of other visionaries who followed the same path, changed the world as we know it.

Maxwell wasn’t thinking of radio, radar or television when he first scratched out the fundamental equations of electromagnetism; Newton wasn’t dreaming of space flight or communications satellites when he first understood the motion of the Moon; Roentgen wasn’t contemplating medical diagnosis when he investigated a penetrating radiation so mysterious he called it X-rays; Curie wasn’t thinking of cancer therapy; … Fleming wasn’t planning on saving the lives of millions with antibiotics when he noticed a circle free of bacteria around a growth of mold; Watson and Crick weren’t imagining the X-ray diffractometry of DNA; Rowland and Molina weren’t planning to implicate CFCs in ozone-depletion when they began studying stratospheric photochemistry. (Sagan 1995:12)

Maxwell, Newton, Roentgen, Curie, and so many other brilliant minds made most of their discoveries by accident because they were immersed in learning for the sake of learning and not setting out to accomplish the feats that they reached. Featured Collections offer a discovery platform for hard sciences to propel this kind of change but also serve to break down barriers for the humanities so that lesser-known humanistic ideas and diverse counter stories can reach global audiences. It is like a giant petri dish for humanists. Audiences can interpret content anew through content co-location and context, and we can find new ways to solve the right problems. Featured Collections demonstrate cooperation amongst students and teachers, uplift counter storytellers, and bring alternative visions to new audiences. We hope that we are creating an online community where researchers can discover new ways to see, assess, understand, and solve problems, while demonstrating to incoming students and encouraging next generations that their voices matter, that their stories will be heard, and that there is hope to have a more equitable and sustainable future.

By including and highlighting content beyond textbooks and research articles, we hope to reach a broader audience while also being adaptive and flexible to audiovisual modalities as they gain acceptance in evolving scholarly landscapes. In his book Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today’s Complex World, David Lankes (2016) echoes Sagan, “ideas and inspirations for great action often come when we least expect it.” He continues that “[w]e need to support reading of all kinds … in the library, in school, on the playground, on vacation, in the laboratory, in video games” and refers to the knowledge creation and learning that happens when we read poetry, novels, science fiction as carrying equal weight “to the ideas that end up in textbooks and research articles” (Lankes 2016:32). An audio file or video might be the hook to get a reader to engage more deeply with our site. Content that is not traditionally considered academic may draw users who would not have otherwise visited PDXScholar.

Featured Collections reflect cultural transformation by showcasing evolving topics in changing contexts, such as with aging, homelessness, food/housing insecurity, racism, sexism, ableism, activism, futurism, discrimination, gentrification, undocumented students, and hyperlocal student-centered community-based or practitioner-based ideas. These topics and their mode of delivery/creation—peer-reviewed articles, podcasts,
presentations, webinar series, lectures, poems, novels, movies, games, posters, philosophical discussions, counter storytelling, and oral histories—are nautilus-like, cyclic, iterative, and transformative in their development and dissemination. Featured Collections create online communities where equity-focused content is elevated, and traditionally marginalized voices can be discovered. It is a way within academia to inspire wonder, excitement, and joy, capture imaginations, elucidate complex concepts, and reignite curiosity and discovery along the lines of what Sagan and other think-outside-the-box creators celebrate. Inspiration is at the core of this framework and can foster transformative learning and open ways for future researchers to envision equitable futures.

**Moving Forward**

In the future, the goal is to spend more time assessing how readers engage with Featured Collections and to study how we can develop and deepen co-creation as an engagement strategy. We need to investigate mentoring models more deeply, for example, the annual Student Research Symposium, to determine how publishing student research impacts students and the scholarly record. We hope to further examine who is using Featured Collections via the Digital Commons Dashboard and Google Analytics and who is talking about the collections via PlumX citation data. Through citation analysis, open-ended survey-style forms, and usability testing questions, we would like to learn more about our users and their research needs and consider other ways that collections could be used, for example, as part of classroom or community-based projects. Currently, we solicit feedback via a form that is embedded on every cover sheet, and we have done some analysis and promotion based on these findings; however, open-ended usability testing questions could better help delineate how researchers are connecting to each other to demonstrate a correlation between collections and communities.

Featured Collections might help to inform the content that we want to collect and promote. For example, building a Streaming Videos and Podcasts Collection could be a way to encourage the creation and hosting of new and forward-thinking podcasts, webinars, and online lecture series. Our podcast series PDXPLORES has been instrumental in capturing the research that happens at our University, calling attention to popular and notable research happening on our campus. In fact, co-locating and promoting this type of content was one strategy for drawing traffic to the repository and reaching broader audiences. By highlighting content that is visually appealing and can be taken on the go, we might help to re-envision scholarly research models and draw in new audiences.

It will be important to devote time and effort to exploring search functionality within the different scopes to experiment with ways to uncover how research is evolving. The Featured Collections offer scopes that were previously impossible to search, and so we have many opportunities to make connections, see new facets of research, and explore usage. We should thoroughly assess the Student Work collection, checking analytics and social media trends after marketing it for one year. We will continue to work with our Alumni Association, University Communications, the Foundation, Research and Graduate Studies, student-run journals, and student-centered events like the Young Historians Conference, the McNair Symposium, the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health Conference, and the Student Research Symposium. Involving students in co-creation and collection development is key to making an impact in the lives of the researchers and on the scholarly record.

Now that we are further along in our project, we need to investigate our goals and outcomes more thoroughly. Some of the longer-running grant-funded studies on societal impact are just being published, and it will be important to take time to understand the impacts of these longitudinal research projects in terms of iterative transformation. It is difficult to assess cross-disciplinary work longitudinally, but it would be helpful to devise better ways to study impact. For example, one of the Institute for Metropolitan Studies Engaged Research Initiative grant projects culminated in a food insecurity panel, and the ramifications of this endeavor and projects like it remain largely unassessed. Could we use Featured Collections as a springboard to research ways to address food insecurity in student populations? In the future, we would like to better demonstrate that amplifying community engagement projects could ignite new projects, spark new ideas, and increase the rate of change. Usability testing with researchers and participants in community engaged projects might demonstrate the iterative nature of these evolving studies, highlighting at least anecdotally how promoting research impacts lives.
Looking at the Past to Change the Future

Through word-of-mouth, social media, or websites, it is evident that creators and leaders have heard about the Featured Collections, are talking to us about it, and are asking for their works to be cross-indexed. More cross-disciplinary content is being seen on the platform, and when new collaborations happen, campus leaders have been reaching out to ask for their work to be archived. In addition, we continue to take the initiative to do outreach to include cross-disciplinary speaker series and other collaborative projects whenever we learn about them. It has been a struggle to capture one-time events, and we need to do a better job of consistently ensuring that these in-person and webinar events are recorded and archived. Making sure that we capture scholarly speakers is important to marketing Featured Collections, ramping up readership, and showcasing online communities.

Call to Action

As Featured Collections are developed at other libraries, these considerations need to be taken into account, both at the outset and throughout the evolution of the project:

- Are we solving the right problems?
- How could we encourage co-creation?
- How can we engage audiovisual learners?
- Are we indexing everything that we should?
- How can we integrate creators and build communities?
- Are we taking risks to support sociopolitical change by decolonizing and rethinking?  

As featured collections are built and researchers engage with the content, these questions need to be re-asked in an iterative process. As research modalities change, the answers to these questions may change, and these ideas will affect how future collections are built and used. For example, as scholars remix and develop findings with Chat GPT and video essays, we need to be flexible and responsive in our approaches to capturing and disseminating content. Perhaps other tools will better serve the content, and the creators themselves can engage in new methodologies and modalities to present new research.

We need to continuously rethink our roles and what it means to participate in the knowledge cycle. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to promote transformative content and offer more fruitful learning opportunities by devising new ways to expand the scholarly record. Libraries are in a unique position to serve as a catalyst and network where we promote ideas beyond academic audiences. Libraries can highlight ways to address complex sociopolitical issues by showcasing current, popular, and resonant research, fostering dialogues and prompting scholars to rethink the college experience and what it means to be part of global online communities. We hope to build increasingly diverse communities of practice, leading to more connections locally and globally, more dialogues, and more ideas that spark positive change. By building communities and fostering co-creation, libraries can lead the way to brighter futures.

REFERENCES


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1 For more information about decolonization, a concept recently introduced to libraries, see Tiua one and Porter 2023. There is much to be learned about how storytelling can help us understand sociopolitical changes in the context of academia.

Percy, Stephen; Gomez, Cynthia Carmina; Romasanta, Lindsay; Cuello Martinez, Ira; Beldon, Mishal; Daryanani, Nikita; Rubio, Carmin; et al. 2022. “Creating a Just Climate Future: A Community Dialogue.” Office of the President Publications and Presentations. 4. Retrieved April 4, 2024 (https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/38236)


APPENDIX A: URLS
- Featured Collections (p. 17) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/featured.html
- PDXPLORES (p. 18, p. 26) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pdxplores/
- Houselessness Roundtable (p. 18) https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/37567
- Creating a Just Climate Future: A Community Dialogue (p. 18) https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/38236
- Indigenous Futurism (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/do/search?q=grace%20dillon%20futurism&start=0&context=20520621&facet=
- Works about Afroboturgy (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/do/search?q=walidah%20imarisha&start=0&context=20520621&facet=
- Counter stories, such as those told by Martin Alberto Gonzalez (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/do/search?q=martin%20alberto%20gonzalez&start=0&context=20520621&facet=
- Climate Justice Collection (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/climate
- Coronavirus Disease Research - COVID-19 (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/covid19
- Racial and Gender Equity Collection (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/equity
- Student Work: An Open Showcase of Outstanding Student-Created Research & Creative Work (p. 19) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/students
- Featured Collections - Climate Justice, Covid-19 Disease Research, Racial and Gender Equity (p. 21) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/equity
- Woman, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, Indigenous Nations Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies (p. 21) https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/chla_fac

APPENDIX B: FILTERS
Filters and results are shown by collection as of January 2024.

Filters for Climate Justice Collection

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Looking at the Past to Change the Future

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**Filters for Student Work: an Open Showcase of Outstanding Student-Created Research & Creative Work**

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INTRODUCTION
Librarianship in the United States is rooted in white supremacy and racial protectionism (Sierpe 2019; Leung and López-McKnight 2021). In the past several years there has been an ongoing reckoning with the harms produced by the practices and policies in several areas of library work such as archives, cataloging, and collections (Leung and López-McKnight 2021; Davis-Castro and Bugg 2023; Roy et al. 2022). How, then, do minoritized immigrant librarians navigate “systems designed as structures of coercive assimilation” (Sierpe 2019:90)? How do librarians initiate critical changes to better serve the increasing number of immigrant-origin students enrolled in higher education? This article is the result of ongoing discussions between two immigrant-origin librarians, Lao-Chinese and Mexican, privileged to work in an area with Lao and Mexican immigrant populations. We discussed our immigrant experience, living in the diaspora, community service work, and library policies and practices. Specifically, discussions were prompted by the struggle to meet the community service requirement for achieving promotion and tenure at our specific institution.

Our understanding of community service was one of co-production with community members. However, the examples given to meet the community service requirement for tenure often invoked a paternalistic perspective whereby professional expertise is used to fill a deficit within the community. This perspective runs counter to our experiences with community and community organizations. When discussing the discrepancy, we realized that our...
conceptualization of community service was informed by several concepts: community cultural wealth model, critical global citizenship, and authentic community engagement. With these concepts in mind, how, then, can librarians and libraries co-create collections and services without replicating historical harms and inequities? We will also discuss tools other librarians can use to develop our own critical global citizenship lens and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigrant Origin Students

The number of immigrant-origin students attending higher education has increased over the last 20 years. Students from immigrant families accounted for 20 percent of all college students in the United States in 2000; however, in 2021, that percentage grew to 31 percent (Batalova and Feldblum 2023). This increase is particularly striking when examining the educational trends of immigrant families. We noted that immigrant-origin students accounted for 80 percent of the overall increase in higher education enrollment in those two decades. National data reflect signs this trend may continue as a 2015 projection estimated that the number of immigrants living in the United States is set to double by 2065 (Budiman 2020).

The growth of immigrant-origin students in higher education necessitates an understanding of their developmental experiences. Several studies have described the many forces and responsibilities immigrant-origin students may face in emerging adulthood, such as "dual forces of acculturation and enculturation" and that their development may be influenced by immigration status, generational status, familial socioeconomic status, gender, language acquisition, and culture (Katsiaficas, Suárez-Orozco, and Dias 2015:99). Studies on immigrant-origin students found that they may face multiple non-academic responsibilities including childcare, eldercare, work, and increased responsibilities as cultural brokers (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, and de Lardemelle 2010; Gong, Kubo, and Takahashi 2014). Still, it is important to note that immigrant-origin students are not a homogenous group. The level of educational attainment, economic status, immigration status, and the extent of support networks differ as well. For example, some members of immigrant families may not have received any formal education, while others may have post-graduate degrees (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2010; Pak, Maramba, and Hernandez 2014).

It is critical when discussing immigrant-origin students that they are not flattened into “controlling images” or stereotypes that “reduces them to the most docile, incompetent subjects” (McMillam Cottom 2019:90). As former immigrant-origin students who attended higher education in California, we are familiar with the tensions that arise when enrolled in higher education. We witnessed the ways that the deficit models place the burden of deficiency onto immigrant-origin students as opposed to placing the responsibility onto the systems and institutions themselves (Liou, Martinez, and Rotheram-Fuller 2016). There is a concerted effort to meet the needs of the diverse student body, but without critical reflection on how the systems replicate historical harms, then those efforts may inadvertently continue those same harms (Leung and López-McKnight 2021; Roy et al. 2022).

Community Cultural Wealth Model

The community cultural wealth model centers around the “array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso 2005:77). She describes six specific forms of capital that students already possess. Those are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. This concept was developed to counter the narrative found too often in the literature about “disadvantaged” students whose lack of knowledge, skills, and abilities prevents them from attaining the social mobility that others attain. Others further described the negative impact of the deficit perspective as a tool to reinforce the hierarchies and power differentials between students and educators (Liou et al. 2016). By pathologizing students, it relieves educators of the responsibility of reforming social and systemic inequalities (Yosso 2005). The community cultural wealth model instead seeks to recognize the strengths of students of color and in doing so challenge the social and systemic inequities found in education.

Critical Global Citizenship

The literature conceptualized global citizenship in numerous ways. One systematic review found that these concepts fell under two broad categories, cosmopolitan and advocacy-based (Oxley and Morris 2013). Simultaneously,
we drew on the discussion on Global Citizenship Education (GCE) to further inform the subsequent application of global citizenship concepts in our work. The history of citizenship education in the United States was nation-centric and assimilationist; GCE focused on “world political changes, understanding the global world, and maintaining the country’s status of ‘world leader’” (Ranco, Gilmer, and Loomis 2020:145). Even as these cosmopolitan perspectives of global citizenship proliferated the literature, so did the alternative advocacy-based perspectives. We work from an advocacy-based perspective of global citizenship, specifically that of critical global citizenship. Critical global citizenship is the “focus on the challenges arising from inequalities and oppression, using critique of social norms to advocate action to improve the lives of dispossessed/subaltern populations, particularly through a post-colonial agenda” (Oxley and Morris 2013:306).

**Authentic Community Engagement**

The Elective Classification for Community Engagement by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recognized and formalized the importance of community engagement (American Council of Education n.d.; Driscoll 2008). The Community Engagement elective is “for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity” (Driscoll 2008:39). Even so, she found “most institutions could only describe in vague generalities how they had achieved genuine reciprocity with their community” (p. 41). The historical and power analysis needed for true reciprocation was missing. For example, Chupp, Fletcher, and Graulty (2021:437) posited that because of “the historic unequal relationships and power dynamics, university-community engagement must also integrate a racial equity lens and a commitment to confront inherent power differentials.” To that end, Chupp et al. (2021) defined authentic community engagement as “two-way knowledge exchange; mutually beneficial relationships; reciprocity; and collaborative work on relevant problems or goals identified by the community itself” (p. 437).

**EXPERIENCES AS IMMIGRANT-ORIGIN LIBRARIANS**

We are two immigrant-origin tenure-track academic librarians working in a large public university. The university is designated as both a Hispanic Serving Institution and an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. Boutsaba is a first-generation Lao-Chinese American, and Balladolid is a second-generation Mexican American. We are the first in our families to attain a tenure-track position in higher education. Like other faculty of color, we retained a strong sense of service to the community (González 2007). Additionally, we bonded over the collectivist values found in our own respective cultures. Previous research in immigrant populations has demonstrated the importance of “family interdependence particularly among Asian Pacific and Latino families” (Katsiaficas et al. 2015:99). They explained that the anthropological studies have identified these social responsibilities and obligations extending further than immediate families to those in the community. The sense of responsibility to the greater community is particularly poignant when considering the demographics of the university that the librarians work in and the demographics of those in the greater geographical area.

**Local Demographics**

Out of 21,924 students attending the university in 2023, 12,543 (57.2 percent) were Hispanic and 2,642 (12.1 percent) were Asian (Fresno State Office of Institutional Effectiveness 2023). This demographic breakdown is reflected by the county demographics as well. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), 55 percent of Fresno County residents were of Hispanic origin, and 11.9 percent were of Asian origin. Although the demographic breakdowns are highlighted, the members of these groups are not necessarily first- or second-generation immigrants themselves. On the contrary, there is a long history of immigration into this area spanning hundreds of years. Some may be third, fourth, etc. generation immigrants or not consider themselves immigrants at all. Still, even as the student demographics of the university reflect that of the surrounding area, the goal of student retention remains unrealized, as illustrated by the current educational trends among Latine and Southeast Asian student populations (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center & Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2020).

Among the Southeast Asian population, Lao Americans have the lowest attainment of bachelor’s degrees at 13 percent as compared to other Southeast Asian groups. For example, 34 percent of Vietnamese, 27 percent of Hmong, and 21 percent of Cambodian students attain a bachelor’s degree (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center & Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2020).
Americans Advancing Justice 2020). In 2021, of the Latine population over the age of 25, 22 percent have earned an associate degree or higher (Excelencia in Education n.d.). Gong et al. (2014) further noted that Southeast Asians “must overcome significant academic deficits yet lack the necessary parental guidance to help them succeed in college… students feel overlooked when it comes to assistance programs to support minority groups” (p. 5). Takahashi and Nottbohm (2019) wrote a report on Hmong students with campus president stating, “Hmong students need institutional and community support for their educational success, and their experiences and life stories are invaluable to faculty, staff, administrators and other students” (p. 3). The need and call for support for Southeast Asian students in California is clearly stated on these reports.

Local History

In 2018, The Atlantic, in partnership with graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, published a series of articles highlighting Fresno’s systemic racist history and its persistent impact on minoritized residents. The first of the article, titled “Fresno’s Mason Dixon Line”, highlights the intentional redlining that occurred in the 1900s and how the “gulf between white, black, and brown residents remains embedded in the city’s geography” (Thebault 2018). This segregation is not a distant problem but one that is reinforced. For example, we have heard the advice given to several new faculty at our institution, “live anywhere north of Shaw or Herndon Ave.” It took several years before we realized what that advice was reinforcing. The Atlantic article explains:

Today, some argue that Shaw Avenue, an east-west thoroughfare that’s one of the city’s busiest, has replaced the railroad tracks as the city’s dividing line. White and wealthy above it, poor, Black, and Hispanic below. A 1970s-era city planning document actually refers to the street as Fresno’s Mason-Dixon Line (Thebault 2018).

This is particularly brutal as it demonstrates how white supremacy and racial protectionism work to reinforce racist systems. We did not question the advice, not knowing this history. Instead, we experienced the impact of this segregation via our community work. The communities we served were often found south of Fresno’s ‘Mason-Dixon Line.’ It was hard to miss the concentration of minoritized communities in south and west Fresno. Ultimately, Boutsaba settled in West Fresno in an area with a large Southeast Asian and Hispanic population. Balladolid settled near family in Madera, a county with a large Hispanic population.

In living and working in these areas, we saw how immigrant communities created and shared their own resources. For example, these communities would host festivals and resource fairs and maintain online resources such as databases, online maps, and social media accounts. It was in these spaces that we found cultural affirmation and resiliency. Even now, our lived experiences have been and continue to be multicultural and binational. We are privileged to travel to our countries of origin to visit with family and to retain the cultural traditions practiced by the communities. Because of these experiences, we approach community service as one co-produced with the community.

CASE STUDY: SERVING THE LAO AMERICANS COMMUNITY

Lao Americans Community in Sonoma

Lao Americans arrived in the United States shortly after the Vietnam War as immigrant refugees. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Lao Americans scattered throughout California. They settled where they felt most at home, mainly in agricultural areas. Sonoma County was home to families who sought farmland and an environment where they could go fishing on the weekend. Many worked for technology companies as assemblers, which required limited English skills. When a few families settled in this beautiful county, they also influenced other friends and relatives from cities like San Francisco to move north. As more Lao Americans congregated, they wanted a place to practice their religion and continue sharing their traditions and cultural practices with their children. Those that resided in Sonoma County felt the need to sustain their cultural values and beliefs. The temple, Wat Lao Saysettha, was purchased and established in 2001 as a religious 503c nonprofit by one of the founders, Phang Phetsomphou, a social worker.

Before changing jobs to Fresno, Boutsaba was a longtime leader at Wat Lao Saysettha. She put her library skills to work after attaining her master’s degree in Library and Information Science (Janetvilay 2015). She used her social media literacy skills to help bring attention and visibility to
this small Lao American Buddhist community in Sonoma County. Currently, she is a board member for Wat Lao Saysettha as well as the agent representative for the organization. As a board member, Boutsaba worked on fundraising to pay off the mortgage for the temple.

**Media Literacy and Community Service**

In 2011, a Facebook page was set up to share the Lao New Year festivities. It turned out to be the key tool for sharing announcements of religious holidays, events, and programs. Boutsaba’s husband, Nam Ing, was a freelance photographer who captured beautiful pictures and shared them on Facebook. This reached Lao American communities in San Francisco, East Bay, South Bay, and as far north as Eureka to pilgrimage Wat Lao Saysettha in Santa Rosa, CA. The fundraising continued for major events like Lao New Year, Boun Ork Punsa, and Boun Katin. Boutsaba then helped the temple coordinate summer food fundraising events to raise more funds and organized a Lao language and cultural literacy class to reunite community members. She marketed the beautiful ambiance of Sonoma County and planned summer food fundraising activities with themes of street food and authentic Lao food. All volunteers learned how to cook and raised funds for the temple. It was a fantastic opportunity to bring people from all over to taste and learn how to perform Lao social circle dance, lumvong. A volunteer DJ played traditional Lao and Thai music while people enjoyed the taste of Lao food and lumvong to the homeland music.

Implicit in this work is the understanding of the community cultural wealth inherent in these practices. This is an example of community service meeting the community needs of the time. Before these practices can be documented and collected, as often done in librarianship, they must be preserved. With persistence and time, the small immigrant community in Sonoma County will reach their goal of sustaining their cultural heritage, religious practice, and enrichment of Lao American tradition. Through these outreach and fundraising efforts, Boutsaba led the effort to pay off the mortgage in late 2023. Their attention is now turned toward developing an iconic Lao temple in Sonoma County.

**Empowering Future Generation of Lao Americans in Fresno**

In 2019, Boutsaba partially moved to Fresno and quickly joined the Laotian American Community of Fresno (LACF), a nonprofit organization. This nonprofit was a more established organization. Many members had professional careers outside of their volunteer work and used their skills to serve this community organization. Because of the additional resources, Boutsaba was able to archive and document the organization’s programs and activities. It is critical to maintain a nonprofit organization’s legal documentation and retain the paperwork for events and programs. When Boutsaba first started working with the organization, the record keeping of their valuable programs was not as visible or accessible to other board members. As a secretary and past co-chair, Boutsaba helped manage their Google shared drive. Any information regarding their events since her involvement has been easily retrievable and readily available for all board members to access. In addition, she helped with organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, and strategizing and budget planning.

The Laotian American Community of Fresno’s mission is to empower the community and youth via education, social, and economic sustainability. The organization hosts an annual youth conference that invites middle and high school students to learn more about higher education at the Fresno State campus. Once a year, they have a scholarship fundraising event under the hot autumn sun at a local winery in Fresno County. Boutsaba was especially inspired by the annual $10,000 scholarships given to college students. It is a labor of love and passion for members of the board to provide such gifts to their community. The work is grassroots, and the impact is long-lasting for many lives that transitioned from poverty into higher education or sustainable careers.

“Universities have a responsibility to promote global citizenship by teaching their students that they are members of a large global community” (United Nations n.d.). Through her work as a faculty advisor to the Lao Student Association, Boutsaba asserted this responsibility. She has lived life as a global citizen. Boutsaba traveled as a refugee and immigrant and has earned a professional position. Now she empathizes and helps students in their own journeys. The experience of teaching is more meaningful to both students and advisors due to the shared common cultural and traditional values. The relationship of networking with the local community and being a faculty advisor created a sustainable system of enriching communities with universities impact. Reflecting
on the last few years of experience working on campus and with community organizations, Boutsaba has grown professionally and reached an esteemed rank by offering her diverse background and perspective of advocating for more inclusive voices, whether on campus committees or library collections. As a faculty member of the campus community, she serves as a faculty advisor for the Lao Student Association (LSA), where her leadership influenced and impacted students to do more for their communities.

**CASE STUDY: SERVING THE MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

As a second-generation Mexican American who was raised in the local area, it was particularly important to Balladolid that any community service undertaken as part of the promotion and tenure process impact the Mexican American communities of Madera and Fresno counties. Nearly 60 percent of Madera County are of Hispanic or Latine descent, and 55 percent of Fresno County are of Hispanic or Latine descent. More specifically, according to the Latino Community Foundation (n.d.), above 90 percent of both Madera and Fresno’s Latine populations are of Mexican heritage. As a former AmeriCorps volunteer post-graduation, Balladolid conducted hundreds of pesticide and heat safety presentations for nearly 1,000 farmworkers in Spanish and English. This sparked a passion for direct engagement with community members close to home. As one Latina so illustratively put it, “Am I going to get caught up in this la la land of writing these papers, and saying this is for the community, and then doing shit” (González 2007:297)?

After attaining a tenure-track position, Balladolid volunteered at REFORMA del Valle Central, a local chapter of REFORMA, a professional librarian organization focused on serving the library and informational needs of Latinos and Spanish speakers. Although volunteering first began with a small role as a member of a scholarship committee, it snowballed into serving multiple roles. Balladolid handled Google submission forms for the scholarship and book grant committees, managed the chapter listserv, co-created a chapter website, and served as the Zoom technician at the monthly meetings. There were also opportunities to directly engage with community members in different community events and periodic book giveaways. The chapter partnered with immigrant community organizations that held several events, such as *El Dia del Niño* and *Posada*. This entailed coordinating donations, coordinating with event organizers, and, if available, coordinating volunteers. Book giveaways were a priority, especially since many areas of Fresno, such as those in south and west Fresno, are categorized as “book deserts” (Unite for Literacy 2024). During these events, the community members brought up prohibitive library hours, the need for more representative books, and difficulties getting their stories published.

During this period, many local Latine authors and illustrators approached the chapter for support in promoting their self-published books. The chapter invited many of these authors to speak at chapter meetings. Several of the stories revolved around journeys of perseverance and resilience in the face of assimilationist forces. Eventually, this request morphed into a collaboration with the local public library to highlight local authors from the area at the Local Authors Book Fair. Simultaneously, during several outreach events, chapter members were getting requests from attendees for culturally relevant books written by authors from the community. Examples included requests for books that explained Dia de los Muertos and Posada, two huge cultural events in Mexico often recreated in the United States. In conversations with community members who requested these books, it became apparent that they were working to retain the cultural traditions of their countries of origin. It was because of these two trends that prompted further reflection as to why these Latine creators were having such difficulty publishing their stories while simultaneously there was such a demand for these stories from the community.

Even as Latine or Asian American authors self-publish their stories, these stories can be excluded from the shelves of libraries and bookstores. This outcome can be attributed to several reasons. For example, there has been a trend in libraries to outsource technical services work (Bennett 2022). Less staffing has meant finding as many efficiencies as possible. Consequently, library staff rely on vendor systems that prize profit and efficiency. These vendors address library workflow issues by working with traditional publishers, providing metadata, and consolidating payments. However, this has meant that at least some collection development and metadata decisions have been outsourced as well. There is more friction when purchasing books that are not traditionally published. The infrastructure is not there to support, for example, different languages. Years of this outsourcing have resulted in decreasing original catalogers available to
catalog books that fall outside mainstream work. This is the case with libraries found throughout the Central Valley, including Fresno and Madera. REFORMA del Valle Central is working on addressing this issue by highlighting representative stories no matter how they are published and connecting those stories to the people within the community. This work continues as REFORMA del Valle Central connects people to organizations to further amplify the reach of the Latine community in the Central Valley.

**DISCUSSION**

*Academic Librarianship and Community Service*

The retention and tenure process at our institution covers three broad areas of requirements: professional effectiveness, scholarly/creative activities, and university/public service. The current model probationary plan states faculty must provide “evidence of no less than two examples of substantial or ongoing community involvement relating in some way to his/her/their professional or educational background, or professional/university service” (Fresno State 2015:15). Balladolid claimed participation in different REFORMA del Valle Central events under community service and a board role under professional service. There were concerns that this could be categorized as double dipping. Consequently, Balladolid claimed her work in REFORMA del Valle Central solely under community work. However, there were still concerns that this did not meet the community service requirement as it did not incorporate electronic resources work. It took months of self-reflection to understand why this was so difficult to process.

As two untenured librarians, we grappled with how community service was interpreted by library colleagues. In a strict sense, it meant doing cataloging and electronic resources work within the community. However, how can there be genuine reciprocity when a “solution” has already been prescribed? As Chupp et al. (2021) stated, authentic community engagement entails “collaborative work on relevant problems or goals identified by the community itself” (p. 437). Such a narrow characterization of how to meet community needs lends itself to so-called community shopping, where the faculty member then searches for a community or community organization that can meet their needs. This further exacerbates existing inequities. It prioritizes communities or community organizations that have the infrastructure in place for those prescribed solutions to be implemented and for the faculty members' needs to be met. The uneasiness generated by the pushback from the differing understanding of community service was captured by Arroyo-Ramirez, Jones, O’Neill, and Smith (2021) when they characterized the “expectation to divorce our identities and act impartial and unfeeling to project the image of the consummate professional” as part of an “institutional culture of toxic ambition” (p. 2). This “toxic ambition” is also related to performative protocols, or the act of engaging with communities to only “further one's own career, tick boxes” (Hird et al. 2023:3).

A large issue here is that this process treats “the university as a self-contained unit, it minimizes the reality that some, if not many people claim their identity in both the university and community” (Chupp et al. 2021:446). We felt a debt owed to our communities to use the skills and resources in a way that benefits our community. Community service then meant contributing to community building first. An example was Boutsaba's work with the Wat Lao Saysettha temple. The community needed assistance in navigating the system and sustaining nonprofit status and survival, which meant social media literacy to promote themselves to their community and register with the state of California. Only in Fresno, at a more established nonprofit, could Boutsaba more directly apply her skills in organization, preservation, and description. Another example is Balladolid's work on creating online applications for scholarships and book grants. It was only after a lot of community work that Balladolid was able to create the online Central Valley Authors & Creators database, a database highlighting stories authored and created by people in the community for people in the community. The initial service was for everyday tasks, done without fanfare but necessary to maintain community. Although initial community work may not seem directly tied to our immediate areas of expertise, those were the actions that ultimately led to the eventual use of those skills.

**Critical Global Citizenship**

Even as we worked with the Lao and Mexican immigrant communities, we had a first-hand view of how “community service” can be co-opted to serve the institution and not the community. We saw community driven physical collections donated to the library without the institutional support necessary to do right by those collections.
The university did not provide the necessary infrastructure, such as space, staff, and time. For example, one of the collections was placed in essentially a large cubicle, the other on a bookcase against a wall. These two endeavors lacked the staff to effectively manage, preserve, and facilitate access to these physical collections. Instead, it was up to Boutsaba to continuously advocate for adequate staffing to treat these collections with the care they deserved. As Clifford states, in response to the creation of the Community Engagement classification from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, there is a need by these institutions ‘to be acknowledged for’ the community partnerships. The discrepancies between what the university marketed and what we saw in action led to deeper conversations about what community-led collections would look like, one that was not performative (Gasman 2023).

Our concern is that in the rush to repair historical harm, initiatives such as these can turn predatory, especially for archival material from marginalized immigrant communities. Not enough care would be given for effective access and long-term preservation of community-driven collections due to the austerity measures and current neoliberal practices within higher education. As Regina Brooks, founder of a literary agency, said, there was a rush for “diverse authors,” but the publishing houses didn’t have the “internal infrastructure to sell” (Alter and Harris 2024). The underlying concern is that this rush will replicate the historical harms as informed by colonial history, where wealth is extracted from the communities of origin to benefit those outside the community. One example is the controversy around American Dirt, a story about Mexican migrants that was criticized as geared toward white audiences (Grady 2020). A People of Color in Publishing and Latinx in Publishing survey on the systemic way this issue is reproduced, “The idea of the “white default”—in other words, the unspoken assumption that any book published will be read by a mostly white audience (and that this perceived white audience is not interested in reading stories outside of the white default)—is one of the problems that keeps the publishing industry from handling books by and about BIPOC responsibly” (Latinx in Publishing 2018:23). This hasn’t changed in the intervening years since. Linda Duggins responded to the state of publishing, “Publishing houses and institutions within this industry are not set up for people of color…You’re bucking up against really entrenched cultures” (Alter and Harris 2024).

There has been a concerted effort to address diversity issues from many fronts, including addressing the lack of people of color throughout the publishing industry and in librarianship. However, there has been widespread backlash to such diversity initiatives. A Lee & Low survey found that the number of Latine employees in publishing dropped from 6 to 4.6 percent between 2019 and 2023 (Alter and Harris 2024). A report by Kendrick and Hulbert (2023) found that between 2010-2022, the number of Asian and Latinx librarians fluctuated between 2-3 percent and 5-6 percent, respectively. This is important because these are gatekeepers throughout the literary supply chain, from publishers to vendors/aggregators to libraries themselves. The impact compounds on one another.

Even when institutional support is not there, we recognize the necessity to reflect the experience of today’s students. The consequence of not valuing a community’s cultural wealth is readily apparent. One example occurred when the legislation requiring ethnic studies passed in California (California State University n.d.). It was then that librarians within the California State University (CSU) system reviewed ethnic resources from multiple information vendors. It soon became apparent that these vendors did not have robust collections for several ethnic groups. The reasons were multi-faceted. Some vendors relied on the digitization of archival materials that were collected over several years by different organizations, including libraries, around the country (Adam Matthew n.d.). Other vendors bundle books and journals that focus on ethnic groups (ProQuest n.d.). However, years of historically exclusionary practices in archives, publishing, and librarianship cannot be overcome overnight (Quiñonez, Nataraj, and Olivas 2021).

Students and faculty continue to demand community created and driven collections. This is not new. In 1968-1969, the Mexican American Student Confederation at California State University of Fresno demanded a room “dedicated to housing works on Chicano history and culture and by Chicano authors” (Fresno State 2022). Fresno is one of the 23 California State University (CSU) systems. These types of spaces exist in other CSUs (Roy et al. 2022). These resource hubs can meet various needs, such as meeting and exhibit spaces. That request was ultimately denied. Fifty-six
years later, this sentiment is still reflected in the requests for inclusive books made by members of the general community during local outreach events.

Work to redress the historical exclusions is ongoing. Robust scholarship requires years of investment ranging from hiring researchers from those communities, infrastructure support such as societies, journals, conferences, and opportunities to truly challenge institutions’ historical policies and practices (Quiñonez et al. 2021). One way to bridge this gap is by supporting immigrant-origin students and faculty whose perspectives can enrich the literature, institutions, and the community. In some cases, that may mean a concerted effort to include global voices, specifically those that were actively silenced. It is here that critical global citizenship may be operationalized.

CONCLUSION

Tools for Practicing Critical Global Citizenship

As stated earlier, librarianship in the United States has been rooted in white supremacy and racial protectionism. It is not lost on us that due to this, a critical concept that needs to be defined is that of the community cultural wealth model. As Booth (2021) notes, people from marginalized communities must not be seen as "objects of study, or groups that need to be 'helped' or 'put right,' their disadvantage stemming from poor choices and 'bad citizenship'. Instead, education for global citizenship must make visible the many structural antecedents of inequality” (p. 63). Therefore, it is critical that anyone interested in co-creating inclusive collections first learn the history of the communities. For immigrant communities, that may entail the global forces that prompted migration in the first place. This is in addition to the local histories of those same communities. By understanding these histories, it is possible then to be more “sensitive and deferential to the needs of communities themselves” (Booth 2021:68).

This work is necessary because as knowledge workers, librarians have a hand on maintaining colonial systems of information and knowledge, the infrastructure, that faculty and students navigate and use in their own research. It is critical that librarians begin questioning the unspoken assumptions in this work. As Hird et al. (2023) discuss, the concept of ontological supremacy is at work in these spaces of higher education. “Academic knowledge systems preserve a power imbalance with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, often by omitting, misinterpreting, extracting from and devaluing Indigenous knowledges while creating singular narratives of ‘truth’ and ‘discovery’” (Hird et al. 2023:1).

Even those from minoritized and immigrant communities must keep questioning their own biases. As discussed earlier, immigrant communities are not homogenous. We constantly question our own power when working with the community. Even as we are part of the community we serve, we are acutely aware that we grew up in a white supremacist culture. We have our own work we need to do to unlearn discriminatory practices and anti-black sentiments found within ourselves and our own communities. This self-reflection is constant. One of us was particularly struck by a particular song lyric, “Are you community made? Are you claimed by who you claim?” (Xiuhtezcatl 2024). This is the practice of cultural humility, one that prioritizes relationships, is other-oriented, and is committed to redressing systemic and structural inequities (Kostelecky, Townsend, and Hurley 2023). The important point is that by building true partnerships, one cannot self-insulate from the potential harm one does because there is a commitment to stay within the community.

More tools for authentic community engagement may be found in works within archives, health, and social sciences (Kline et al. 2018; Ghaddar and Caswell 2019; Gabiola et al. 2022). A common thread among all is to see community members and community organizations as true partners. This may entail placing community members in project leadership roles, empowering them to take ownership, and getting out of their way. What does this look like in libraries? There are several initiatives underway for the ethical collection of these resources. One such initiative is the Mukurtu platform, an open access platform that provides “differential access to community members and the general public and to create space for traditional narratives and knowledge labels that foreground Indigenous knowledge in the metadata of digitized cultural heritage materials.” (National Humanities Alliance 2024). In practice, this is a power sharing endeavor where Indigenous community members act as their own gatekeepers of their own resources.

We want to encourage more academic librarians to be more involved with the community they are serving. Ideally
living within the community and regularly attending community-led events to begin those relationships. The barriers or invisible walls between community and institution must come down for historical harms to ever be addressed. That cannot be done if librarians escape accountability of their work by retreating into the ivory tower. It is through this modeling that librarians can critically question current library practices and policies and work towards more fundamental change.

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Resourcing Your Community: Building a Connection Through Overlooked Histories

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INTRODUCTION
Located in the third-most populous city in California is the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (King Library). Home to a unique collaboration between San José State University and the City of San José, the King Library gathers the academic and public library world under one roof. Although each organization has its own objectives, the institutions come together as one entity, expanding their reach outside of their standard roles by removing accessibility barriers. The King Library was the first library in the United States to integrate the services and collections of a major university and a public library system. Since its opening in August 2003, the King Library prides itself on having nine floors that hold a vast collection of materials and unique resources dedicated to lifelong learning. The jewel of the collections can be found in Special Collections areas, home to the San José State University (SJSU) Library's African, Asian American, Chicano, & Native American (AAACNA) Center and San José Public Library's (SJPL) California Room. The California Room holds archival items dedicated to California history with an emphasis on the City of San José and the greater Santa Clara County. This heavily used collection is popular with both public and academic researchers. AAACNA Center supports the instruction and research of historically underrepresented groups by housing resources that support different areas of ethnic studies. Both collections are curated by librarians to support researchers’ needs through a combination of rare and unique primary source materials.

Despite this outstanding wealth of resources, one researcher entered the library seeking information about a specific local community group, and the library staff was surprised to discover that the library’s ample collections held minimal information on the subject. Unsurprisingly,

ABSTRACT
Community-based research is a valuable tool used to address inequities in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library’s local history archives. By collaborating with the community to establish permanent collections dedicated to those overlooked narratives, the library realized its community members were an untapped resource who were enthusiastic to fill informational gaps and appreciated the opportunity to preserve information for future generations. By acknowledging the historical significance of their previously undocumented experiences, equity was added into Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library’s archival collections and, in turn, helped the community see value in a relationship with the library. Simple neighborhood discussions between the library and its diverse community led to the development of programming, events, and exhibits honoring and celebrating unique and personal contributions to the local history archives. This chapter illustrates a successful example of how thinking outside the box can create positive change that spotlights the accounts of marginalized communities and contributes to a greater historical narrative by capturing untold stories and honoring suppressed voices.
this was due to the fact that "[t]he archival community has historically under documented the experiences of African Americans and other marginalized groups, so this is not a new predicament for academic institutions or repositories" (Hughes-Watkins 2014:28), resulting in a tremendous amount of cultural heritage materials not being preserved outside of families passing down items through the generations. For that reason, it is imperative to create partnerships with the members of the community that hold onto these precious cultural materials. "Partnerships provide opportunities to expand resources and services to users and engage with the broader community beyond the library walls" (Munster, Harrington, and Negro 2017:4).

This chapter will discuss how one question led to the use of a new approach in addressing informational gaps in the library’s collections and how that change led to the creation of permanent, equitable collections of cultural heritage materials. Lastly, the author will demonstrate the importance of establishing a strong, collaborative relationship with the local community that both sides deem as beneficial.

THE PROCESS

Power of a Question

A researcher entered the library seeking information about the local lowrider community and Lowrider Magazine, which was founded in San José. Since both were relevant to local history, one would assume that the library would have information on both. Lowriding was established in the 1940s as part of the Chicano/Mexican American culture that centered around youth lowering cars and applying uniquely customized paint jobs. This rich form of cultural expression has flourished through the generations because the lowrider community is more than just car enthusiasts. Their history is full of activism, innovativeness, and more. For these reasons, the story of the lowrider community was deemed important, and both the AAACNA Center and California Room were tasked to scour their respective collections to see what resources were available to assist the researcher. The libraries’ combined collections were found lacking. The lowrider community has a long, turbulent history in San José, resulting in it not being considered of historical significance. The objective then became to rectify such an oversight.

The correction started with library staff conducting their own research. A staff member was assigned to read through the materials and pull out any information, such as names, events, and dates that could potentially help them locate other potential materials. This is a standard part of any research process. Unfortunately, the staff member hit a dead-end. It was time to think outside the box and take a non-traditional approach, leading to the opportunity to do some outreach. However, "[b]efore engaging in outreach efforts, it was critical to strengthen the policy’s language regarding efforts to acquire archival materials of historically underrepresented people and communities" (Hughes-Watkins 2014:35). By reviewing and evaluating the policies, the library was able to address any issues that could arise as they worked to collect material that could potentially fill informational gaps. This is especially important because it has become increasingly difficult to establish collections of historically underrepresented communities "as generations of immigrants transformed once homogeneous neighborhoods to multicultural epicenters burgeoning with various languages, traditions, and new social mores,” resulting in the misappropriation of materials through assimilation (Hughes-Watkins 2014:28-29). For this reason, the library found it vital for them as a research institution to seek out and capture such important histories before they were lost. Expanding the collection policy to include the active seeking of materials from community members gave the library the ability to answer specific research inquiries.

By taking the names pulled from this research, the staff member decided to reach out to networks within their social circles, as well as use social media to get in touch with different members of the lowrider community and establish connections. Each interaction began with the staff member introducing themselves and providing an explanation of why the person was being contacted. It then became a conversation about the project and what the person could do to help, creating a partnership between the library and the people. By connecting with the lowriders, this project became a community-based research (CBR) project.

Community-Based Research

The library’s approach to this project became a partnership where it was mutually beneficial to create inclusive and equitable library collections, as it strengthened the library’s holdings and ability to fulfill research requests while
also helping the lowrider community feel respected, honored, and important enough to be documented. “Community-based research involves collaboration between trained researchers and community members in the design and implementation of research projects aimed at meeting community-identified needs” (Strand 2000:85). Specific to this case, the community-identified need came from the library, and the community agreed, deciding it would be worthwhile to become involved. “For organizations and institutions, community engagement is an opportunity to build active relationships with individuals and other entities for mutually beneficial exchanges” (Fritz et al. 2021). Once the partnership was established, it became a process of networking, having those community partners making introductions and encouraging people to speak with the library, making it more individual oriented. Honma (2016) states that being able to work together requires an enactment of collective engagement, using the importance of working in solidarity to empower historically disenfranchised communities. It was because of this collective agreement that, within the 1.5 years of the project, more than 100 lowrider community connections were established through the CBR process.

One of the reasons this research approach was so rewarding was because those community partners trusted that their library partners would treat their community contacts with respect. “Instead of treating communities as “laboratories” and community members as convenient samples, as is more typical in conventional research, CBR holds as a central tenet the involvement of community members in every stage of the research process, from identifying the research question to formulating action proposals that derive from the research results.” (Strand 2000:85). Another reason was that they trusted that the library would value each connection made, no matter if they ended up being fruitful for the project or not. That is because “[d]eveloping effective partnership requires investment of time, attention, and resources from both sides” (Taylor, Pratt, and Whelan 2021:58). The community partners took time out of their lives to initiate the conversation with other community members, making them aware of the library’s project and encouraging them to take the time to meet with library staff.

In order for CBR to be successful, it also requires those participating in the research project to honor “the knowledge and skills each party brings to the table, …enhanc[ing] the quality of work by creating opportunities not possible by one side on their own” (Taylor et al. 2021:58). The library trusted that their community partners would put them in touch with people from the lowrider community that could potentially have something to offer to the project, while the community partners trusted that the library would keep to their word about documenting the history. Without the trust in the library from the community partners, this project would not be possible. Beyond that, “[t]he distinctive combination of collaborative inquiry, critical analysis, and social action that CBR entails makes it a particularly engaging and transformative approach to teaching and engaged scholarship” (Cutforth et al. 2003:5).

By using a CBR approach, the library was able to answer the needs of a researcher and ultimately provide a feasible way to capture a historically significant community’s story that had been undervalued and introduce it to, not just the research/academic community, but the wider community. Proving that “CBR offers higher education a powerful and innovative means for combining the traditional academic missions of teaching, service, and scholarship” (Cutforth et al. 2003:14).

Collections, Exhibits, Programs and More

Through the CBR process, the library not only collected materials that would support the needs of one specific researcher but was able to establish permanent collections that reserved a place for the lowrider community in the state’s historical record. But it was important for the library to remember that its job is more than the extractive nature of collecting. Call and Mims (2020:67) argue, “[w]e cannot rest on the assumption that if we simply fill the archive with new voices, perspectives and experiences, it will automatically attract new users. If it is our intention to be more inclusive, we must do more to open the space to those who have not historically been our main audiences” (Call and Mims 2020:67). This is why the library decided to hold an exhibition of the newly acquired materials, honoring the local lowrider community.

The “Story and King: San José’s Lowrider Culture” exhibition ran from December 15, 2018, to March 31, 2019, celebrating and honoring the lowrider culture of San José. The goal was to capture the true history of the culture and counteract the negative stigma that was placed on that
community by city officials and police. Alongside the materials collected through the library staff’s research, more than sixty contributors loaned their items to the library to be displayed during the exhibition. Together, the library and the lowrider community were able to assemble more than 200 pieces of lowrider memorabilia, including photographs, magazines, programs, flyers, paintings, models, car club plaques, street signs, park signs, replicas, clothing, trophies and more.

As a complement to the exhibition, the library also organized three panel events. The first panel event, entitled “Out of the Past: San José’s Lowrider History,” featured five individuals who discussed the historic lowrider scene of the area. The second panel event, entitled “Lowrider Culture and Society,” featured three panelists who discussed the overall significance of the lowrider culture from an academic standpoint. The final panel event entitled “The Future of Lowriding in San José” featured four panelists from the current lowrider scene and its growth in popularity. The exhibition brought over 1,000 visitors to the library and over 900 people to the three panel events. We also caught the attention of the local newspaper and two city council members for the work we did honoring part of the historically neglected heritage of the Chicano community and for using it to dispel negative stereotypes placed onto the lowrider culture.

By organizing the exhibit and associated events, the library was able to connect with potential donors and public stakeholders, which helped propel the lowrider project beyond what the library thought possible. It was during one of the panel events where another question arose that caused the library to realize there was much more work to do to repair the inequalities in the archival collections. Expanding on the lowrider project, the library began working to document the city’s East Side community, as much of the East Side’s story and people had gone undocumented. The library then decided to follow the same model used for the lowrider project, turning to the community once again. By using the newly established community relationships, the library was able to connect quickly with even more community members for the sole purpose of documenting the history of the East Side. It became clear through this second phase of the research project that “developing collaborative partnerships with cultural heritage groups is a productive way to include them in the conversation around access and preservation and to give library users access to richer, more diverse primary source materials” (Lucky and Harkema 2018:189).

The “East Side Dreams: The Untold Story of East San José” exhibition ran from July 1, 2022, to September 24, 2022, chronicling the people, the development, the activism, and the events that helped shape the East Side of San José. Simultaneously, the library also exhibited supporting photographic collections curated in the 1980s by one of our community partners, documenting different elder (senior) members of the East Side community. Additionally, two corresponding panel events were organized to support the exhibit. The first panel, “East Side Stories: Community Members & Activists,” was a two-part event where five community members reminisced about what it was like to grow up on the East Side, while four community activists discussed what it was like to be active on the East Side. This placed value on what was being seen in the exhibition by providing firsthand experiences. The second panel, “The East Side’s Impact in San José: A Conversation with Scholars” featured three scholars whose research added to the story of the East Side. By its conclusion, the exhibition drew over 1,800 visitors to the library and over 300 to the two panel events. The library once again caught the attention of local media and was able to leverage the connections previously made with city government to connect with more community members, which led to receiving attention at the state government level. Each government entity wanted to recognize the library staff for the work and community collaboration that was being done to honor the underrepresented communities of San José. The library received a “Certificate of Recognition” from the California State Assembly, and the staff member who spearheaded these projects and curated the exhibitions received a commendation from the San José City Council for their work to preserve forgotten histories.

OUTCOMES & TAKEAWAYS

One major outcome of working with the community was the collective realization that the library needed to do more to address the historical inequalities in its collections, and “[a]s more progressive attitudes toward history began to challenge the appraisal practices of archives, a new charge for archivists was established that demanded a reassessment of previous policies” (Hughes-Watkins 2014:29).
By becoming aware of the various historical inequities and wanting to ensure that no narratives are excluded in the future, the library reevaluated its collection development process. “Centering relationships and community partnerships and decentering collections requires a major cultural change” (Calls and Mims 2020:77). Hoping to lead the archivists away from “the traditional modus operandi in the profession, even as it has proven problematic and has resulted in whitewashed collections reflecting dominant cultural values and mistrust in the community” (Call and Mims 2020:70). It is important to remember that when embarking on projects like this, trust is often key to its success. Especially because “[w]hen the intention is to represent a specific locale, the history of the majority culture too often rises to the surface and everything gets lost” (Call and Mims 2020:69). Which may be why the library’s archives are focused on the predominantly white wealthy landowner’s population. “Or, what majority culture considered relevant or important, in regards to underrepresented persons, events, or histories does not align with how those they are documenting would appraise and preserve their own cultures” (Call and Mims 2020:69). The collections that were established feature both physical and digital materials that document the local lowrider community, community organizations, local activism, and more.

Another outcome from our CBR projects is that they have helped the library establish relationships outside of the traditional order, showing that it is beneficial for the library to move further away from “past practices dictated that we build relationships in order to build collections” and “reevaluate how we show up as community partners” (Call and Mims 2020:63). What these projects did was challenge the practices that created inequalities, “[b]ut it is also an opportunity to assess the environment and begin to address the physical and cultural obstacles that may conflict with our abilities to engage with various communities” (Call and Mims 2020:68). These projects not only helped the library establish relationships with outside organizations and community members, but it also paved the way for future opportunities for collaboration, which supports the fact that “[s]ometimes community partnerships evolve beyond their original intention in wholly positive ways” (Pershing 2023:282).

One takeaway was that “[w]hat all partnerships share is reciprocity, created out of clear mutual goals and an agreed-upon system for evaluation and refinement of the collaboration” (Pershing 2023:279). What made the CBR successful was that the library approached the communities with respect and honesty. When meeting with the different community members, the library was honest about the project’s purpose and limitations. Being sure to make no false promises about what they could offer was essential. It was also important for the library to explain its plans for the materials it was gathering for its collections and how the materials could be accessed by the public and potential researchers in the future. “Working with communities requires understanding the motivations and goals of all partners and working together to manage expectations and resources” (Lucky and Harkema 2018:190). This type of honesty is what inspired our community partners to trust the library with the contact information of their friends and family. The library accepted every meeting and listened to everyone’s story, no matter the outcome. “Without engagement and understanding of a community’s composition, there can be misunderstanding, misrepresentation, miscommunication, and missed opportunities” (Fritz et al. 2021). Indeed, we missed opportunities due to some community members having had previous negative interactions with the library. Leading to the takeaway that “[t]he issue of insider/outside status when embarking on a community project can be quite pronounced, particularly along racial lines” (Honma 2016). Mending such relationships requires an understanding that being of a different racial background does not mean that one cannot comprehend the value of those of another race. More importantly, in order to correct the negligence of the information world, the community and the various institutions must come together, knowing there is value in collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Presented in this chapter is a successful example of how valuable communities can be for libraries, particularly when addressing challenging inequities. These two research project examples demonstrate how community engagement can be beneficial to all parties involved. The CBR projects have helped both the public and academic sides of the King Library expand and synthesize their combined mission and the strategic vision both sides have for the library. While the university side of the King Library focuses on student and faculty needs, the public side of the library
focuses on the needs of the community. The approach of using a library-community collaboration for these projects presented an opportunity to build on the combined vision. “The most successful collaborative projects are driven by the needs of campus researchers or community partners and are designed with outcomes that serve all stakeholders, including the library” (Lucky and Harkema 2018:190). This proves that when faced with challenges, there is great potential for success when libraries “pursue new ways of partnering” so they can have a greater impact on their communities (Munster 2017:15).

It is important to remember that social justice projects like these are ongoing, and by resourcing the community, the library does not have to do such important work alone (Honma 2016). This is why creating a strong foundational relationship with the community based on “[c]ommunication, thoughtfulness and clearly defined intention are keys to success” (Pershing 2023:283). Without such relationships some stories will remain lost forever, creating a great injustice to past, present, and future generations.

REFERENCES
Same Book, New Tricks: How an Academic-Public Library Partnership Revitalized a Rural Library

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ABSTRACT
In 2020, many small communities in California’s Central Valley lost their public libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the public library in rural Shafter is thriving today as a result of a unique partnership between the local community college and Shafter: the college provides ongoing library staffing for the city’s library, while the city provides facilities, collections, and oversight for the library. This partnership, though not without its challenges, has provided both Shafter Library and Bakersfield College Library with a singular opportunity to engage multiple communities and expand library access beyond traditional conceptions of an academic or a public library. In collaborating, the two public entities give a rural community back its public library with greater access than before and with expanded services. This case study describes how this collaboration was achieved, the current operations of Shafter Library, how this collaboration has impacted the city and the college, and provides advice for those considering similar partnerships.

INTRODUCTION
In 2020, many small communities in California’s Central Valley lost access to their public libraries due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While most have reopened, they continue to face threats to budget, hours, and staffing. Yet, the public library in the rural city of Shafter is thriving today, with more hours than any other in Kern County. This seeming miracle is due to an agreement that the City of Shafter entered with the Kern Community College District (KCCD) in 2021 to create a new public library that would open as the library part of the city’s Library and Learning Center. The agreement states that the city will provide the building and library materials in addition to staffing and oversight for the Learning Center and institution as a whole, while KCCD’s Bakersfield College “operate[s] and manage[s] the library premises” by providing the staff and management of the library (see Appendix). The resulting public library is staffed by Bakersfield College Library employees who report to the Bakersfield College Library dean, while the materials, collection, and building are owned and managed by the City of Shafter via the Education Partnership Director for Shafter.

When the Bakersfield College librarians searched for similar library partnerships to model from, where one institution provided staffing of the library while the other managed and funded the space and materials, they came up short. While partnerships between public libraries and K-12 schools do not infrequently occur, public library partnerships with academic libraries are less common (Association for Library Service to Children 2023; Gunnels, Green, and Butler 2012; Hoover 2012). Moreover, many partnerships between public libraries and school or academic libraries focus on a shared, joint-use library where each institution contributes staff, materials, and management toward the joint-use space rather than one institution providing staffing and the other providing materials.
and management (Hoover 2012; Rolloff 2013). A few library partnerships utilize dual management so that one director reports to the college and one director reports to the public library, but these clear management structures do not reflect the Bakersfield College-Shafter agreement (Gunnels et al. 2012). As detailed later in this paper, the management of Shafter Library has created ongoing confusion and a lack of structural clarity for both partner institutions and for all involved staff. In lieu of a Library Director, the City of Shafter provides leadership via the Education Partnership Director, whose scope and areas of expertise lie outside of library experience and education. Lacking such perspective, the Director seeks input and defers decision-making to the Bakersfield College Library staff who work at Shafter Library, yet these employees have no titled authority and no on-site authority to refer to. The Bakersfield College Library Dean, who, much like the City’s Director has little library knowledge or experience, tends to defer to the Bakersfield College Library Chair and receives day-to-day operational issue updates from the Bakersfield College Library faculty liaison to Shafter.

Those partnerships that do not focus on a shared space with mutual exchange of materials and resources are collaborative in very different ways than the Bakersfield College-Shafter partnership. A partnership between St. Joseph County Public Libraries and the University of Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Libraries created the ability for university community members to request and return public library books to the university library, while the University of Arkansas at Little Rock shifted one of their physical collections into the Central Arkansas Library System to allow for shared use of the collection (Dixon 2018; Liebst 2013). In contrast, Bakersfield College Library and Shafter Library maintain separate collections with separate usage agreements for patrons. Finally, a partnership between Maryland’s Howard County Library System, Howard County Public School System, and Howard Community College focuses on collaborative outreach and instructional efforts between the three institutions to create better information literacy outcomes in the county. Collaborative outreach for better information literacy is a hopeful by-product of the Bakersfield College-Shafter agreement rather than its main impetus (Howard County Library System n.d.).

After sifting through the available documentation of library partnerships and finding a lack of documented partnerships where responsibility for space, materials, library management, and staff were split between two different institutions, the Bakersfield College librarians realized that the partner institutions needed to forge their own way toward creating an effective and healthy public library via the Bakersfield College-Shafter partnership. Written by the current Bakersfield College Library Faculty Chair and the Bakersfield College library faculty liaison to Shafter, this case study describes how this collaboration was achieved, the current operations of Shafter Library, how this collaboration has impacted the city and the college, and provides advice for those considering similarly nontraditional partnerships.

**Kern County and the Kern Community College District**

To better understand the creation of Shafter Library, via partnership between the city of Shafter and Kern Community College District, some context about the county, the community college district, the community college, and the city is useful. The Kern Community College District (KCCD) serves communities spread out over 24,800 square miles in parts of 5 different counties: Kern, Tulare, Inyo, Mono, and San Bernardino (Kern Community College District 2023). Kern County, KCCD’s service area, is geographically the third largest county in the state—covering about 8,135 square miles—and the estimated population of the county as of July 1, 2023, was 913,820 (U.S. Census Bureau Kern, n.d.). The demographic breakdown of Kern County residents is 56.8% Hispanic or Latino, 30.4% white, 6.3% Black, 5.8% Asian, and 2.8% American Indian or Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau Kern, n.d.). KCCD consists of 3 colleges: Bakersfield College (serving the City of Bakersfield and its surrounding area), Cerro Coso Community College (located in Ridgecrest, CA, and serving California’s eastern Sierra Nevada and eastern Kern County regions), and Porterville College (serving the City of Porterville and its surrounding area), and its 2022-2023 enrollments were 213,278 (KCCD Institutional Research, n.d.).

**Bakersfield College**

Bakersfield is the largest city in Kern County (population 413,381), and Bakersfield College (BC) is the largest community college in KCCD with a 2022-2023 total
enrollment of 166,832 or 78.24% of KCCD's total enrollment (U.S. Census Bureau Bakersfield, n.d.; KCCD Institutional Research, n.d.). BC's racial and ethnic demographics are somewhat similar to that of Kern County's: 66.6% of BC students identify as Hispanic or Latino (granting BC the designation of a Hispanic Serving Institution), 19.8% are white, 4.1% are Black, 2.4% are Asian, 2.1% are Filipino, and less than 1% are American Indian/Alaska Native (Bakersfield College “Renegade Scorecard” n.d.).

BC was founded in 1913 and is one of the nation's oldest continually operating community colleges (Bakersfield College ”About Bakersfield College,” n.d.). The college serves students on its 153-acre main campus in northeast Bakersfield, in addition to its Delano Campus 35 miles north of Bakersfield, the Weill Institute in downtown Bakersfield, and BC Southwest in southwest Bakersfield (Bakersfield College ”About Bakersfield College,” n.d.). Additionally, Bakersfield College offers courses at sites in several rural farming communities surrounding Bakersfield, including Delano, McFarland, Arvin, Wasco, and the Shafter Learning Center.

The BC Library serves the research needs of the BC community via the Grace Van Dyke Bird Library on the Panorama (main) campus, as well as libraries on the BC Southwest, BC Delano, and BC Arvin campus centers. There are five full-time, tenured/tenure-track faculty librarians (four reference/instruction librarians and one technical services librarian) in addition to several adjunct librarians. Librarians' duties include reference, instruction, outreach, collection development, and service to the college. The BC Library also employs three full-time and two part-time classified staff at the Grace Van Dyke Bird Library. Classified staff at Bakersfield College Library are responsible for circulation, textbook reserves, and book ordering and processing.

The City of Shafter

Shafter, a small rural city of a little over 21,000 residents, lies about 20 miles northwest of Bakersfield (U.S. Census Bureau Shafter, n.d.). Shafter's demographics differ slightly from the overall demographics of the county. It has a significantly larger Hispanic community, with 84.7% of its residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 12.9% as white, 1.7% as Black, and less than 1% as Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan, or Pacific Islander. Since 2010, the City of Shafter has funded the Shafter Education Partnership, the goal of which is to cooperate with local K-12 schools and invest in formal learning communities, as well as foster informal educational opportunities and connections (City of Shafter n.d.). In 2014, Shafter built a Learning Center as an extension of this department, moving into the existing city public library to offer community-focused classes, tutoring, and access to computers for residents (Bakersfield College 2022; Shafter Library & Learning Center n.d.). In 2017, Bakersfield College established a presence at the Learning Center through its Rural Initiatives program and began offering college classes, registration events, and counseling at this site.

Before the closure of Shafter’s public library in March 2020 due to COVID-19, this library belonged to the county library system, which is the sole public library system in the county. However, once libraries and other public services began reopening to the public in 2021, the county library system had no plans to reopen Shafter’s library branch. Moreover, even as the county library reopened its branches, the majority of their libraries were only open 2-3 days per week for 6-7 hours per day. In June 2023, while the county library system had reopened 22 library branches, only seven of these were open for more than three days per week (Kern County Library n.d.). This remained the case until 2024, when the City of Bakersfield partnered with the county to fund additional days open, bringing the total to 14 branches slated to be opened five days a week throughout the county (Garcia 2024; Bakersfield Californian 2024).

Creation of the Agreement

In 2020, after the Shafter Library closure, a nonprofit group gathered over 1400 signatures on an online petition requesting that the County Board of Supervisors reopen the library (Bergen 2022). They collected such a large amount of signatures in a small rural city, a significant indication of the love Shafter residents hold for their public library and the impact of the closure of the library on the community. In response, Shafter city leaders began working with the community college district leaders to determine what collaborative possibilities might exist to resurrect Shafter Library. In 2021, the Shafter City Council voted to operate the library independently in partnership with Bakersfield College (Bakersfield College 2022). This vote severed Shafter’s connection to Kern County Library so that the
new Shafter Library could operate independently of that system. Shafter and Bakersfield College (KCCD) signed the official agreement on September 9, 2021 (Appendix). The agreement states that the City of Shafter will provide the library space and fund library materials, including the collection and appropriate furniture; Bakersfield College will “operate and manage the library premises,” including “the lending of books and other materials, the cataloging of the library’s collection, and the provision of personnel, resources, tools, programs and services consistent with the operation of a public library” (Appendix).

Bakersfield College administrators first informed the Bakersfield College faculty librarians about the development of the agreement during the Spring 2021 semester. At that time, administrators had determined the following: The library would hire two part-time (19 hours per week) classified staff positions for Shafter Library and would provide regular on-site academic library assistance by college librarians, with the hope that this service would drive further enrollment in college courses offered at the city’s Learning Center. For the work of reopening Shafter Library, the college would also offer to assign half of the time of a current Bakersfield College program manager. However, as detailed in the Operation section, this plan quickly proved ineffective, and the Bakersfield College program manager and library chair were able to successfully advocate for the hiring of one full-time Bakersfield College Library Technician and one part-time Bakersfield College Library Assistant to staff the Shafter Library on a day-to-day basis. After much work and planning, the Shafter Library reopened to the public as part of Shafter’s Library and Learning Center on January 19, 2022 (Bakersfield College 2022).

**OPERATION**

*Role Definitions and Organizational Chart*

To better understand the roles of the Bakersfield College (BC) administrators, faculty, and staff and Shafter City staff who coordinated and completed the opening of the Shafter Library, the following definitions and organizational chart may be useful.

- **Library Dean:** The administrator and supervisor over the faculty and staff in the BC Library (see Figure 1). The Dean has the authority to hire, discipline, and evaluate library faculty and classified staff.

- **Program Manager:** A management-level position between deans or directors and classified staff employed by the Kern Community College District Office or by BC. Program managers may supervise classified staff but may not supervise faculty. The program manager at Shafter Library was supervised by the Director of Marketing for BC and was assigned to work part of their hours to reopen the Shafter Library in the first six months of this project.

- **Library Chair:** An elected role for a tenured library faculty with a 2-year term. Faculty at BC may not supervise other faculty and the chair role is not a supervisory one. The faculty chair’s responsibilities include serving as the primary spokesperson for their department between faculty and administration, creating the schedule for that department, participating in the hiring process for full and part-time faculty and classified staff in their department, and participating in the evaluation of all full-time and part-time faculty in their department (Kern Community College District n.d.).

- **Library Faculty Liaison with Shafter:** A tenure-track faculty librarian at BC who has agreed to take on the role of the Shafter Liaison with BC Library. As faculty, the liaison may not take on any formal managerial or supervisory roles. However, the liaison is responsible for library decisions outside of staffing, such as outlining work processes, managing and developing the library’s collections, budget, grants, and streamlining processes and roles between Shafter and BC staff. The liaison spends four hours per week physically at the Shafter Library and completes the rest of their liaison work remotely from Bakersfield College. This position can rotate to another librarian.

- **Library Technician:** A BC Library full-time classified staff assigned to work at the Shafter Library. This position includes staffing the Shafter Library desk and managing circulation for the library, including book requests and shipping of those books back to the partner library system.

- **Library Assistant:** A BC Library part-time (19 hours per week) classified staff assigned to work at Shafter Library who primarily staffs the library circulation desk.
City of Shafter roles

- Education Partnership Director: A full-time position paid for by the city of Shafter who oversees all education partnerships the city participates in, including the Shafter Library and Learning Center, with cooperation from Richland School District and Shafter High School. The Director reports to the Shafter City Manager.

- Learning Center Manager: A full-time position paid for by the city of Shafter who supervises city staff onsite, coordinates events and marketing efforts, and schedules staff, classes, and programming.

Preparation Phase

As stated previously, Kern Community College District agreed to assign half the time of a BC program manager to coordinate the reopening of Shafter Library in October 2021. The program manager was expected to split their time between the college’s Marketing and Communications department (who hired them) and the Dean of the BC Library. Once on-site at the library to begin work, the program manager successfully advocated for more of their scheduled hours to be served at the library due to the immense amount of work needed to open Shafter Library by the expected date of January 2022. This allowed the program manager to focus their efforts on the 3-month timeline from the start of their involvement in the project in October 2021 until the library’s opening in January 2022.

Prior to this assignment, the program manager primarily supervised BC’s Health, Equity, and Learning Collaborative and coordinated BC’s Get Out the Vote campaign. The program manager began the position in July 2021 and was hired in part for their public library experience of three years with the Kern County Library system, supervising the Northeast Library branch and the Beale Memorial Library’s children’s library. After redirecting to the library project as assigned, the program manager learned their special knowledge and expertise in public libraries was unique among the managing team and would be heavily utilized in the lead-up to re-opening.

The initial planning team for city library operations included the program manager, the BC Library Chair, the
Figure 2: The Shafter Library prior to the pandemic closure.

Figure 3: Shafter Library during preparation to reopen.

Figure 4: Shafter Library and Learning Center during preparation to reopen.
BC Library Dean, Shafter’s Learning Center Manager, and the Education Partnership Director for Shafter. The program manager’s work at this time included developing collection development and privacy statements, creating Shafter Library and Learning Center’s new mission statement and logo, and working with Learning Center management and a commercial third-party library operator contracted by the city to create collection profiles, library policies and procedures, and staff training procedures. In addition, the program manager oversaw the transition of the previous public library collection to a new library management system (LMS) and the cataloging of new material purchased during the COVID-19 shutdown. Prior to the COVID-19 closure, the Shafter Library used the shared LMS for the San Joaquin Valley Library System (paid for via the Kern County Library system), but once the Shafter Library became independent from Kern County Library, they no longer had access to this LMS. The city of Shafter funded the addition of the new LMS, as the Bakersfield College Library uses an LMS funded by and unique to the California community college library system, and this system cannot be used by a public library. Almost the entirety of the above work completed by the program manager requires knowledge and skills specific to public libraries and does not fall under the purview of BC library faculty. As a result, if the program manager had not been assigned to this project, the policies, mission, staff training, transition to the new LMS and subsequent cataloging of new material would not have been successfully completed by the January 2022 deadline, and the work may have needed to be contracted out to someone with the appropriate expertise.

While the county board of supervisors had officially gifted Shafter Library’s collection to Shafter in the transition of operations, county library staff had removed many new and popular titles within the collection prior to gifting (mainly manga and graphic novels) and had set all library titles currently circulating to reroute to county library headquarters. What remained in the collection was largely older, outdated, or damaged titles. With limited time until the library’s reopening, the program manager focused on heavy weeding and cleaning of the most used area, the children’s collections. By opening, the program manager had weeded over 1,500 titles, purchased several hundred new titles, and then sorted, processed, cataloged, and individually scanned these for records in the new LMS. The city of Shafter funded and continues to fund the purchase of all new titles for Shafter Library, as, according to the agreement, the two libraries do not share material and Shafter maintains ownership of the Shafter Library collection (Appendix). In November 2021, the BC library chair and dean hired a part-time library assistant for Shafter Library and this assistant helped with the materials processing mentioned above. To ensure Shafter Library reopened on schedule, several additional BC Library classified staff worked overtime hours during KCCD’s Winter Break (mid-December to mid-January).

In preparation to open, the program manager and library staff also transformed the interior of Shafter Library. Thanks to funding provided by an outside company, a modular classroom and a children’s reading room modular attachment were added to the building. Additionally, in accordance with the agreement, the city purchased shelving, furniture, and other library materials as recommended by the program manager and installed these materials according to the program manager’s direction (Appendix). The program manager guided these decisions and communicated them to the Education Partnership Director at the Shafter Learning Center for his approval. This work culminated in the library’s grand reopening and ribbon cutting ceremony on January 18, 2022.

Stabilizing Phase

Operations during the first year of the library’s reopening focused on streamlining library services, completing large collection projects begun before opening, and normalizing daily operation of the library between the city and college staff. In January 2022, the program manager assigned to Shafter Library was hired by the BC Library as a full-time, tenure-track faculty librarian with an assignment as the college’s Shafter Library liaison. In February 2022, the BC Library hired a full-time library technician for Shafter Library. Together the three BC Library staff (library technician, library assistant, and library faculty liaison) combed through the library’s collections to ensure all titles had transferred to the new LMS, weeded the adult and young adult collections, and genrefied adult, young adult, and children’s chapter fiction to make these more accessible to community members. After Shafter Library received a state grant allowing them to purchase titles from
Amazon and created a relationship with a nearby library network to allow a more affordable version of inter-library loan, the Shafter Library collection expanded past the limitations of its small physical building so that community members could once again access titles in the library itself and beyond.

The BC faculty and staff tasked with day to day library operations at Shafter Library navigated the challenge of running a public library with little to no direction from BC administration and in a work environment managed by an entirely different administration. The BC library faculty liaison with Shafter Library provided assistance and guidance largely in absentia, as their new full-time role as BC Library faculty limited their liaisonship with Shafter Library to 4 hours per week of work at the branch itself. This librarian’s relationship with Shafter’s Education Partnership Director proved invaluable in making this work as smoothly as possible. The Director and the library faculty liaison involved each other in decision making and asked each other for input. Meanwhile, BC classified staff at Shafter Library connected with the liaison regarding any concerns or problem solving needs they had. The Learning Center staff hired by the city, though trained on basic library operations such as checkout and shelving, primarily ran the Learning Center side, provided tutoring for students, and helped teachers (also hired by the city) with classes and event prep.

Current Ongoing Operations

At the time of writing, about two years after the library’s reopening, the staff have settled more comfortably into the rhythm of daily work. Though the Shafter Library and Learning Center’s partnership with Bakersfield College fuses an academic institution with a public one, that fusion is rarely perceived by front-facing library patrons. As mentioned earlier, the Shafter Library has its own catalog and learning management system separate from BC’s (and entirely different in purpose, providing primarily to children and parents looking for non-academic materials). Aside from collection development-related tasks performed by BC staff, such as creating library displays, weeding, purchasing, cataloging books, and tracking reading challenges, most of the daily library operation is performed by Shafter staff. Communication between Shafter and BC staff takes place informally onsite and via emails, texts, and calls between the library liaison, library technician, Learning Center manager, and Education Partnership Director. Annually, these individuals also meet with the BC Library Chair and the dean to review processes and issues.

RESULTS

Now that the agreement between KCCD and the City of Shafter has entered its third year, it’s possible to ascertain some impacts of this partnership for both entities. The authors believe that these respective impacts may be useful considerations for those interested in similar partnerships.

Impact on Bakersfield College

The BC librarians had many concerns about the ways this agreement would impact library faculty and staff, largely stemming from their perception that college administrators did not fully understand the large difference in mission and services between a public library and an academic library as well as the differences between public librarians and academic librarians. Aside from the fact that none of the current BC librarians were interested in working at a public library, the librarians questioned whether traditional public library services would be offered at Shafter Library or if BC expected the librarians to simply create a small academic library at that site. Though these concerns were voiced to BC administration, they went unanswered during the lead-up to reopening the Shafter Library, and the librarians answered these on their own without administrative support or direction.

One particular difficulty involved staffing Shafter Library. KCCD agreed to supply classified staffing for Shafter Library via the BC Library and expanded the Library budget to include two new staff positions. However, the BC Library could only hire classified staff for Shafter Library using current district position descriptions and current classified staff union contracts, all of which were created for an academic institution and an academic calendar. This caused the BC Library some difficulty in advertising for the positions, as interested applicants would perceive them as regular BC Library positions in a completely different city. Additionally, the BC Library closes during semester breaks, and part-time BC Library positions are 10-month rather than 12-month positions.
Figure 5: An exterior photograph of the Shafter Library and Learning Center.

Figure 6: An interior photograph of the main library area inside the Shafter Library and Learning Center.

Figure 7: An interior photograph of the entrance to the library from the Learning Center side.
Thus, the part-time Library Assistant at Shafter Library is a 10-month position, and Shafter Library struggles to make these hours workable for a public library open 12 months per year. The BC Library chair has been advocating for the Library Assistant to be approved as a 12-month position but ideally for the creation of a second Library Technician position at the Shafter Library, as the BC Library believes that Shafter Library would function much better under the supervision of two full-time staff. However, at the time of writing, the second position had not yet been changed into either a 12-month or a full-time position, and staffing coverage remains a concern.

Additionally, while BC agreed to supply the budget for the two classified library staff for Shafter, this increased budget does not reflect the time and effort spent by the BC Library Dean, BC Library Chair, and BC Library faculty liaison to handle the high-level operations of the Shafter Library and to mitigate and navigate challenges as they occur. Since these positions were not designed to include Shafter Library duties, the dean and two faculty are not directly compensated for their work to ensure that the Shafter Library remains operational.

Management structure

A second pressing concern for the BC librarians was the management of Shafter Library. At the time the agreement was signed, BC administrators believed that a BC program manager working 20 hours per week to reopen Shafter Library within three months was sufficient to reopen Shafter Library. Beyond those three months, they did not make plans for a BC staff role dedicated to making managerial decisions once the library reopened. While the BC Library hired two classified staff for Shafter Library, classified staff contracts specify the type of work they are qualified to conduct, and managerial tasks typical of a degree librarian would fall under a faculty librarian’s purview. If the BC Library did not have a librarian on staff with interest in or experience with public libraries to liaise with Shafter, Shafter Library would not be as well managed or successful as it currently is. Nothing in the agreement for this partnership stipulates any such experienced staff, which makes a dip in quality of services likely should any current BC library staff assigned to Shafter leave. For libraries interested in creating similar partnerships, the BC librarians recommend working public library experience into contract language and creating a clear plan for managerial decisions for the public side of the collaboration.

In its ideal iteration, the Shafter Library and Learning Center staff function in tandem, with the Learning Center staff running Learning Center classes, tutoring, and the Learning Center desk, while BC staff run library programs, manage and develop the library’s collections, and staff the Library circulation desk. However, this scenario rarely actualizes in practice. Without central BC management onsite, any change in BC staffing (due to staff being out sick, taking vacation, or personal emergencies) often goes without notice by BC until the Learning Center manager sees an unstaffed library desk. Additionally, the job classifications of library technician and library assistant, as outlined by BC, do not provide for public library related tasks. This leads to the public’s expectation of public library activities such as story times, LEGO® clubs, and more clashing against BC staff’s contracts, which indicate that running library programming would entail staff working out of class. As a result, BC staff at Shafter often feel frustrated and unable to perform their job effectively.

Impact on the City of Shafter

Shafter residents have responded enthusiastically to the reopening of their public library along with its increased hours and new collection, which can be illustrated by comparing pre-COVID-19 data from Shafter’s library with current statistics. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Shafter Library was open Monday through Thursday for a total of 32 hours per week. Despite limited hours, the library saw a high amount of program attendance and monthly circulation of materials. In fiscal year 2017-18, Shafter Library averaged 375 program participants monthly and 1,392 checkouts per month (Picman 2019). In contrast, the city’s Library and Learning Center is currently open a total of 55 hours per week, averaging 1,085 program participants monthly and 1,533 material checkouts per month according to 2022-23 fiscal year numbers (California State Library 2023).

From fiscal year 2017-18 under the county library to fiscal year 2022-23 under the city and college district’s partnership, Shafter Library increased its opening hours by nearly 72%, its monthly circulation average by 10%, and its program participants by 189%. Though the hours increased significantly across the board, the biggest change in hours was...
the addition of another day (Friday). Currently, the library is open from 8:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., Monday through Friday, whereas prior to the library closure, the library was open from 11:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., Monday through Thursday (California State Library 2023; Picman 2019). While the increase of 10% circulation may seem small in comparison to the addition of hours open, the library sees little traffic in the early morning hours and is heavily frequented by children in the after-school hours (3:00-7:00 P.M.). The morning hours provide valuable self-guided learning space for toddlers and families before and after their Learning Center courses and will likely continue to grow due to the ongoing development of a weekly story time program. Program statistics have drastically increased in large part due to combining the Learning Center free class attendance numbers with additional library programming. As mentioned in the Operations section, prior to the partnership, the county operated the library (as part of the county library system), and the city operated the Learning Center. Although they occupied the same building and were similarly aligned in goals and services, neither included each other's program numbers in its statistics. The city/college partnership fosters cohesion between the Library and Learning Center, making advocacy for the organization more clear cut and easy to understand for community members and city officials.

Managerial Challenges

While the convoluted management of the Shafter Library and Learning Center has proven successful in daily operations and ongoing minor hurdles such as new projects for the library, circulation goals, and new library initiatives like the Summer Reading Program, this can be attributed more to the strength of the individual staff members (namely the library faculty liaison with Shafter, library technician, Learning Center Manager, and Education Partnership Director) and their collaborative leadership than to the structure of the partnership itself. A nationally politicized climate uncovered the holes in this approach in June 2023.

In a report released by the American Library Association (2023) in May 2023, requests to remove library materials have increased at an alarming rate over the past couple of years. The number of challenges in 2022 nearly doubled that of those in 2021 and reached a record high since challenge tracking began over 20 years ago. Overwhelmingly, the titles targeted are written by or about people of color and/or LGBTQ+ people (Meehan and Friedman 2023). An increasing number of challenges are backed by political pressure and headed by Christian nationalist groups such as Moms for Liberty, a group connected to 58% of national advocacy-led book bans (Meehan and Friedman 2023). These challenges can be harder to track due to the removal of entire classroom libraries as well as local leadership preemptively reacting by removing titles that may be considered offensive or not putting them on shelves in the first place, the latter occurring at Shafter Library in June 2023 (Meehan and Friedman 2023).

In preparation for an upcoming Pride display, the Bakersfield College Library Technician emailed all Shafter Library & Learning Center staff to inform them of the display and of proper protocol for any complaints that might arise. Within 90 minutes, Shafter's Education Partnership Director instructed a pause on the display in order to discuss the legality of such a display with the city council. Given the nature of the agreement, the BC staff at Shafter Library had little recourse but to comply with the request (Appendix).

In conversations between the Shafter library liaison and the city's Director, the liaison illustrated the benefit of a display highlighting materials to underserved areas of the community and pointed out concerns regarding the pressure this decision had put on the BC Library staff to anticipate and cater to possible negative reaction from library patrons mobilized by national political movements against libraries. To their credit and the credit of the good will already garnered through this partnership, the Director did listen and involve the liaison in what ultimately became a staff procedure developed by them regarding library displays: staff would consider all perspectives in creating displays, but not avoid controversy by avoiding displays altogether. Although this mitigated an in-the-moment issue, the result was no Pride display for June 2023, no plans for displays for future Pride months, and a demoralized city library staff in regard to decisions around future displays of library materials.

RECREATING THE PARTNERSHIP

For those interested in recreating a similar partnership between public and academic institutions, the authors recommend establishing a robust and well-delineated plan for staffing and managing the resulting library. Much of the confusion over staffing and leadership of Shafter Library...
resulted from a lack of understanding of a public library’s mission, schedule, and the day-to-day management inherent in running a successful public library. If both Bakersfield College and Shafter City leadership had sought more opinions about the management and running of a public library before starting this process, and if a clear day-by-day manager of Shafter Library was established up-front (along with a definitive chain of command from college administration and city administration to the manager and their staff), many of the hurdles encountered so far with Shafter Library could have resolved much more quickly.

One way to circumvent this issue for future partnerships might include splitting staffing and management more equally between the partner institutions, rather than one institution providing staffing and the other providing management. The BC librarians firmly believe that this partnership would be much more effective with a clearer chain of management for Shafter Library in place. Since the two BC Library classified staff do the vast majority of the work to run Shafter Library, the addition of a Central Library Director possessing knowledge and expertise in public library operation would provide dedicated structure and guidance for existing staff and further the vision of this partnership for both BC and Shafter. The BC Library Chair, Dean, and faculty liaison have continuously advocated for a program manager position to fill this role but have yet to succeed in its approval.

Small and rural communities face unique challenges when it comes to funding public services, and such problems call for innovative problem-solving. While the partnership detailed here is not without its issues, the decision to enter into this agreement allowed the community of Shafter continued and better access to their public library, the fate of which was otherwise uncertain. Not only has the reopening of the Shafter Library given the public back its beloved library and deepened the relationship between Shafter and Bakersfield College, but it has also paved the opportunity for personal betterment through formal and informal learning, a goal shared by both academic institutions and public libraries alike. Other rural leaders looking to revitalize their public services may find that forging similar partnerships with their local higher education systems, utilizing the author’s above recommendations, will create new opportunities for their local libraries to serve their communities.

REFERENCES
APPENDIX

AGREEMENT FOR THE PROVISION OF LIBRARY & EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES AT THE SHAFTER LIBRARY BETWEEN THE CITY OF SHAFTER AND KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT (ON BEHALF OF BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE)

This AGREEMENT FOR THE PROVISION OF LIBRARY & EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES (“AGREEMENT”) AT THE SHAFTER LIBRARY is made and entered into this 9TH day of SEPTEMBER 9, 2021, by and between CITY OF SHAFTER, a California municipal corporation, (hereinafter referred to as “SHAFTER”) and the KERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, a California Community College District, on behalf of BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE, (hereinafter referred to as “KCCD-BAKERSFIELD”) (collectively referred to herein as the “PARTIES”).

A. SHAFTER is the owner of building and property located at 236 James Street (Assessor Parcel Nos. 027-060-002 & 027-060-008) in the City of Shafter, a 1,650 square foot portion of which (“LIBRARY PREMISES”) was previously used and
operated as a public LIBRARY as part of the County of Kern Public Library System (“COUNTY) serving the residents of COUNTY and the City of Shafter. The LIBRARY PREMISES are shown on the attached Exhibit “A” to this AGREEMENT.

B. On or around February 15, 2017, COUNTY and CITY entered into that certain Agreement for Lease of a Portion of 236 James Street (“LEASE AGREEMENT”) for the purpose of allowing COUNTY to use the LIBRARY PREMISES to operate a COUNTY LIBRARY for the benefit of Kern County residents and residents of the CITY.

C. Section 6 of the LEASE AGREEMENT provides that “[i]f County reduces the library operating hours below 24 hours per week, the City shall have the right to terminate [this] Agreement with 90 days written notice.”

D. Since COUNTY has reduced LIBRARY operating hours to below 24 hours per week to the detriment of the residents of CITY. As a result, CITY provided written notice to COUNTY of their intent to terminate the LEASE AGREEMENT.

E. CITY also provided notice to COUNTY pursuant to California Education Code, Section 19104 of their intent to withdraw from the COUNTY free library system and assume the responsibility for delivery of library and library-related services to the residents of the City of Shafter, after such notice was published in accordance with the requirement of California Education Code, Section 19106.

F. As a result, CITY wishes to partner with KCCD-BAKERSFIELD for the provision of future library and other educational services to the residents of CITY.

G. The purpose of this AGREEMENT is to set forth the rights and obligations of the PARTIES with respect to the administration, management and operation of a LIBRARY on the LIBRARY PREMISES and the provision of other educational services, including but not limited to lending books and other materials, cataloging the LIBRARY’s collection, and other related activities consistent with the operation of a public LIBRARY by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD.

H. It is understood and agreed that such cooperative relationship yields benefits to both PARTIES, including the provision of more robust LIBRARY services to the residents of CITY and greater exposure, marketing and reputational prestige for KCCD-BAKERSFIELD.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing and the promises herein contained, the PARTIES hereby agree as follows:

1. SCOPE OF SERVICES

Subject to the terms and conditions set forth herein, KCCD-BAKERSFIELD agrees to operate and manage the LIBRARY PREMISES in CITY. Operation and management of the LIBRARY PREMISES shall include, but shall not be limited to, the lending of books and other materials, the cataloging of the LIBRARY’s collection, and the provision of personnel, resources, tools, programs and services consistent with the operation of a public library. KCCD-BAKERSFIELD agrees to operate the LIBRARY PREMISES by providing free LIBRARY services to the patrons of the LIBRARY. A detailed Statement of Work is attached as Exhibit “B” to this AGREEMENT and incorporated herein by reference.

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’S performance under this AGREEMENT is contingent upon the continued effectiveness of this AGREEMENT and [ADD OTHER CONDITIONS - SEE EXHIBIT “B” SAMPLE]

2. FUNDING AND PAYMENT

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’S LIBRARY management services shall be provided in the LIBRARY PREMISES only. This AGREEMENT does not apply to other CITY facilities that may be used by the PARTIES. KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall occupy and have exclusive use of the LIBRARY PREMISES for the administration, management, and operation of said LIBRARY as provided herein for the term of this AGREEMENT and any extensions thereof.

3. TERM

The term of this AGREEMENT shall commence upon the execution of this AGREEMENT by the PARTIES and end on June 30, 2031. THE PARTIES may mutually elect to extend this Agreement for successive terms subject to the approval of the KCCD-BAKERSFIELD and CITY’s City Council. CITY shall notify KCCD-BAKERSFIELD of such election in writing no less than 180 calendar days prior to the termination date of this AGREEMENT. Within sixty (60) days after receipt of such notice
from CITY, KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall provide written notice of acceptance or rejection of such extension.

If this AGREEMENT is not extended or renewed, or if KCCD-BAKERSFIELD fails to respond to CITY’s request for extension as provided in the preceding paragraph, and CITY has no other arrangement for administration and operation of the LIBRARY PREMISES, all terms and conditions of this AGREEMENT shall remain in full force and effect not to exceed six (6) months.

4. ANNUAL REVIEW OF AGREEMENT

This AGREEMENT will be reviewed annually by the parties to determine any necessary changes to the AGREEMENT. Any changes to the AGREEMENT shall require the written consent of CITY and KCCD-BAKERSFIELD.

5. LIBRARY PREMISES MATERIALS COLLECTION, FURNISHINGS, AND EQUIPMENT

A. LIBRARY PREMISES Materials.

All digital media and physical books, periodicals, audio/video materials, and other LIBRARY PREMISES resources and tools (collectively known as “Materials”) contained in the LIBRARY PREMISES on the beginning date of this Agreement, are the property of CITY. In addition, all Materials contained in the LIBRARY PREMISES at the termination or expiration of this AGREEMENT are and shall remain the property of CITY. As part of its operational responsibilities as set forth herein, KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall have the discretion and responsibility for selecting and purchasing all Materials for the LIBRARY PREMISES’ collection on behalf of CITY, utilizing the funding described herein and donations specifically designated for collection materials. KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall also have the discretion to de-select and re-assign materials to best meet the needs of the community.

Some donated Materials and Materials previously purchased, but which are no longer in circulation, may be sold or disposed of by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD as appropriate. All funds received for the sale or disposal of any such materials shall be deposited into the account for operation of the LIBRARY PREMISES and shall be used solely for LIBRARY PREMISES purposes.

B. Furnishing and Equipment.

All furnishings and equipment contained in and designated for use solely in the LIBRARY PREMISES, including but not limited to bookshelves, desks, tables, chairs, study carrels, RFID equipment and software, telecommunication and computer equipment and systems, office machines, and appliances, are and shall continue to be the property of CITY. Any future additions to the LIBRARY PREMISES’ furnishings and equipment purchased with funds provided for or by CITY, including reserve funds, shall be the property of CITY. In the event that any furnishings, equipment or supplies are purchased for use in the LIBRARY PREMISES by another entity, such furnishings, equipment or supplies shall be deemed the property of CITY. This provision shall apply to all security system equipment and upgrades purchased by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD for the LIBRARY PREMISES, purchased for the purpose of facilitating the use of the LIBRARY PREMISES.

6. MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall keep reasonably itemized and detailed records and reports pertaining to the management of the LIBRARY PREMISES as required by law or grants in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and shall be available to CITY for inspection after reasonable prior notice to KCCD-BAKERSFIELD. Records shall be retained in accordance with KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’S record retention schedule and shall be conveyed to CITY upon expiration or termination of this AGREEMENT.

7. DONATIONS

Unless otherwise specifically stated or designated by the donor, all donations made to or at the LIBRARY PREMISES shall be deemed to be made to the LIBRARY PREMISES.

8. EMERGENCY

In the event of a catastrophic, unplanned and/or reasonably unforeseeable event or emergency which (a) results in the closure or inability of the LIBRARY PREMISES to open for more than one week, (b) results in a significant loss of LIBRARY PREMISES materials, and/or (c) which significantly impairs the ability of the LIBRARY PREMISES to maintain the current level of LIBRARY PREMISES service, THE PARTIES shall meet as soon as possible to determine and mutually agree upon how and in what manner to proceed with LIBRARY PREMISES operations.

9. TERMINATION

At any time during the term of this AGREEMENT or any extension thereof, either of the PARTIES to this AGREEMENT may, on six (6) months’ prior written
notice to the other party, terminate this AGREEMENT without cause.

10. ASSIGNMENT
KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall not assign this AGREEMENT or any part thereof or any monies payable hereunder without the prior written consent of CITY. Any attempt to assign without such written consent shall be void.

11. INSURANCE
KCCD-BAKERSFIELD is insured through State-Wide Association of Community Colleges (SWACC) and their insurance includes coverages that satisfy the following requirements:
A. GENERAL AND AUTOMOBILE LIABILITY INSURANCE: The general liability insurance shall include personal injury liability coverage, shall afford coverage for all operations of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD at the LIBRARY PREMISES, and shall include contractual liability for the AGREEMENT between CITY and KCCD-BAKERSFIELD. The automobile liability insurance shall cover all owned, non-owned and hired motor vehicles which are operated on behalf of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD pursuant to KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’s activities hereunder. CITY and its offers, employees and agents shall be named as “Additional Insured” on any policy. The limit of liability of said policy or policies for general and automobile liability insurance shall not be less than $5,000,000 per occurrence combined single limit for bodily injury and property damage. Personal injury coverage should also be in the amount of not less than $1,000,000 per occurrence and aggregate. Said policy or policies shall contain a provision that such insurance as is afforded by this policy shall be primary and contributory to the full limits stated in the declarations, and if THE PARTIES have other valid and collectible insurance for a loss covered by this policy, that other insurance shall be excess only.
B. WORKERS’ COMPENSATION INSURANCE: Statutory Workers’ Compensation and Employer’s Liability Insurance shall cover all KCCD-BAKERSFIELD staff while performing any work incidental to the performance of this AGREEMENT. The policy shall provide that no cancellation, major change in coverage, or expiration shall be effective or occur until at least thirty (30) calendar days after receipt of such notice by CITY.
C. CITY shall maintain in effect during the life of this Agreement the following policies of insurance issued by an insurance company rate not less than “A-,VI” in Best Insurance Rating Guide: (1) commercial general liability insurance (including contractual, products and completed operations coverages, bodily injury and property damage liability insurance) with single combined limits of not less than $1,000,000 per occurrence; (2) commercial automobile liability insurance for “any auto” with combined single limits of liability of not less than $1,000,000 per occurrence; (3) workers’ compensation insurance as required under state law and (4) Cyber liability insurance of not less than $1,000,000. CITY policy shall contain an endorsement naming KCCD BAKERSFIELD as an additional insured insofar as this Agreement is concerned and provide that written notice shall be given to KCCD-BAKERSFIELD at least 30 days prior to cancellation or material change in the form of the policy or reduction in coverage. CITY shall furnish KCCD-BAKERSFIELD with a certificate of insurance containing the endorsements required under this section, and KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall have the right to inspect CITY’S original insurance policies upon request. Upon receipt of written notice of cancellation, change or reduction in coverage, CITY shall immediately file with KCCD-BAKERSFIELD a certified copy of the required new or renewal policy and certificates for such policy. Nothing in this section concerning minimum insurance requirements shall reduce CITY’S liabilities or obligations under the indemnification provisions of this Agreement.

12. INDEMNITY
In lieu of and notwithstanding the pro rata risk allocation which might otherwise be imposed between the parties pursuant to Government Code Section 895.6, the parties agree that all losses or liabilities incurred by a party shall not be shared pro rata but instead all parties agree
that pursuant to Government Code Section 895.4, KCCD BAKERSFIELD shall fully defend, indemnify and hold CITY, its officers, board members, employees and agents, harmless from any claim, expense or cost, damage or liability imposed for injury (as defined by Government Code Section 810.8) occurring by reason of the acts or omissions of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, its officers, board members, employees or agents, under or in connection with or arising out of any work, authority or jurisdiction delegated to such party under this Agreement.

CITY shall fully defend, indemnify and hold KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, its officers, board members, employees and agents, harmless from any claim, expense or cost, damage or liability imposed for injury (as defined by Government Code Section 810.8) occurring by reason of the acts or omissions of CITY. No party, nor any officer, board member, employee or agent thereof shall be responsible for any damage, claim, expense, cost, or liability occurring by reason of the acts or omissions of other parties hereto, their officers, board members, employees or agents, under or in connection with or arising out of any work, authority or jurisdiction delegated to such other parties under this AGREEMENT.

13. DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE

Bill Moseley, Dean of Academic Technology is the representative of KCCD BAKERSFIELD and will administer this AGREEMENT for and on behalf of KCCD BAKERSFIELD. David Franz, Education Partnership Director is the representative for CITY and will administer this AGREEMENT on behalf of CITY. Changes in designated representatives shall be made only after advance written notice to the other party.

14. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR

The PARTIES, in the performance of this Agreement, will be acting in their individual governmental capacities and not as agents, employees, partners, joint venturers, or associates of one another. The parties intend that an independent contractor relationship will be created by this AGREEMENT. The employees or agents of one party shall not be deemed or construed to be the employees or agents of the other party for any purpose whatsoever.

15. ENTIRE AGREEMENT AND AMENDMENT

In conjunction with the matters considered herein, this AGREEMENT contains the entire understanding and agreement of the parties and there have been no promises, any of the parties, either oral or written, of any character or nature hereafter binding except as set forth herein. This AGREEMENT may be altered, amended or modified only by an instrument in writing, executed by the parties to this AGREEMENT and by no other means. Each party waives their future right to claim, contest or assert that this AGREEMENT was modified, canceled, superseded, or changed by any oral agreements, course of conduct, waiver or estoppel.

16. COMPLIANCE WITH LAW

CITY shall, at its sole cost and expense, comply with all county, state and federal ordinances and statutes now in force or which may hereafter be in force with regard to this AGREEMENT.

17. CALIFORNIA LAW

This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of California. Any litigation regarding this Agreement or its contents shall be filed in the County of Kern, if in state court, or in the federal district court nearest to Kern County, if in federal court.

18. MEDIATION

If any dispute, controversy or claim arises under this AGREEMENT, the parties shall negotiate in good faith to settle the matter. If the parties are unable to resolve the matter within a reasonable time, the parties may submit the matter to mediation by a trained mediator approved by both parties, the cost of which shall be shared equally by the parties. Nothing in this Section shall preclude any party from seeking injunctive relief or other equitable remedies (whether prior to or during such mediation) if necessary to protect the interests of such party.

19. NOTICES

Any notice required to be given hereunder shall be deemed to have been given by depositing said notice in the United States mail, postage prepaid, and addressed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TO</th>
<th>Attention: CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER <a href="mailto:contracts@kccd.edu">contracts@kccd.edu</a></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCCD-BAKERSFIELD</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CITY:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Attention:
20. COUNTERPARTS AND ELECTRONIC/FACSIMILE SIGNATURES

This Agreement may be executed in several counterparts, which may be facsimile or electronic copies. Each counterpart is fully effective as an original, and together constitutes one and the same instrument.

21. AUTHORITY

Each of the PARTIES represents and warrants that its City Council and/or Board approved this AGREEMENT and authorized its respective designees to execute the same.

In concurrence and witness whereof, this AGREEMENT has been executed by the PARTIES effective on the date and year first above written.

[signatures redacted for this appendix]

Exhibit A

Statement of Obligations

1. DELIVERY OF SERVICES

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, through its Library Department, shall deliver general LIBRARY management services to CITY according to the terms and conditions set forth herein.

2. GENERAL LIBRARY PREMISES MANAGEMENT SERVICES

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD agrees to provide general LIBRARY PREMISES management services for CITY, which include administration, management, and operations of LIBRARY PREMISES services, and will provide personnel and other resources, tools, programs and services, including lending books and other materials, cataloging the LIBRARY PREMISES’ collection and other related activities consistent with the operation of a free public LIBRARY PREMISES. KCCD-BAKERSFIELD must not employ any personnel, purchase or rent supplies, equipment or services, or incur any expenses in the name of CITY.

3. LEVEL OF SERVICE AND STAFFING LEVELS

A. LEVEL OF SERVICE AND STAFFING

LEVELS RECOMMENDATION: The level of service and staffing levels for general LIBRARY PREMISES management services, along with its proposed operational budget for the following fiscal year to CITY will be recommend by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD on or before March 1 of each year with service level adjustments (if needed) occurring July 1 of the following year. KCCD BAKERSFIELD will provide CITY with a list of its proposed staffing levels for the LIBRARY PREMISES for review. If no list is provided by March 1, staffing levels will be presumed to be unchanged from the following year. Staffing levels shall not be reduced below what is required to open to the public for forty hours per week (excepting holidays and hard closures based on KCCD/California School Employees Association agreement, unless by special arrangement) by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD without the approval of CITY, including proposed reductions due to any furloughs or other work schedule reductions, staffing and scheduling of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD employees. Where proposed reductions in staffing levels are the result of mid-year budgeting changes by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, CITY shall have the option of providing additional financial support to maintain staffing levels previously agreed to between the PARTIES as set forth herein.

B. LIBRARY PREMISES STAFFING: All persons required for the performance of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’S responsibilities under this AGREEMENT must be selected and employed by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD and must at all times be and remain agents or employees of KCCD-BAKERSFIELD. No persons employed or retained by KCCD BAKERSFIELD for performance of its duties under this AGREEMENT shall at any time be deemed or considered to be the agents or employees of CITY.

KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall be responsible for the selection, supervision, training, discipline, and scheduling of all LIBRARY PREMISES staff. The operating and personnel procedures of the LIBRARY PREMISES Department of KCCD BAKERSFIELD will at all times apply to KCCD-BAKERSFIELD’S operation of the LIBRARY PREMISES.

Prior to the appointment or transfer of a Supervising Librarian/Branch Supervisor to the LIBRARY PREMISES, KCCD-BAKERSFIELD shall, through its LIBRARY PREMISES Director, meet and discuss with CITY, the proposed appointment or transfer. CITY shall have the right to request different personnel than those proposed; however, the
ultimate decision regarding appointment or transfer resides with KCCD-BAKERSFIELD. The parties recognize that KCCD-BAKERSFIELD has the sole responsibility and authority for making personnel decisions relating to its employees.

4. GRANT ADMINISTRATION AND PROGRAMS

The administrative function will also include the ability and authority for KCCD BAKERSFIELD to apply, administer and implement grant opportunities for the benefit of CITY with the expressed written permission of the Designated Representative of CITY. If the additional level of service is tied to a grant program, CITY will be invoiced for actual, additional costs above the grant award for the applicable time period unless KCCD-BAKERSFIELD and CITY agree otherwise. This assumes that any grant funds are received directly by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, CITY may request and KCCD BAKERSFIELD may provide cost estimates prior to implementation of a grant and/or program. CITY understands that actual, additional costs may vary slightly (high or low) from original estimates.

Any supplemental, material expenses related to ongoing programs will be recommended by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD to CITY in advance of purchase. CITY understands and accepts that if a supplemental item related to an ongoing program is not approved by KCCD-BAKERSFIELD, CITY may exercise the option to refrain from further work on the grant or program. KCCD-BAKERSFIELD will apply departmental and or city-wide overhead to a grant cost when the provisions of the grant allow for the accounting of overhead expense. CITY understands and accepts that the net cost of grant overhead may become an expense to CITY when other provisions are not agreed upon in writing by both parties in advance of the implementation of the grant. CITY understands and accepts any ongoing fiscal, staffing, and/or programmatic obligations incurred in the acceptance of a grant. An example of such obligation may include a grant requirement to retain a staffing position for a time period beyond the original grant award period.

5. FACILITY UPKEEP, MAINTENANCE, AND REPAIRS

The following are EXCLUDED from this AGREEMENT and the responsibility of the entity indicated:

A. Maintenance and repair of the LIBRARY

B. Custodial services and supplies needed for the operation of the LIBRARY PREMISES and LIBRARY PREMISES restrooms shall be provided by CITY.

C. Utilities and solid waste collection shall be provided by CITY.
The Library Cares About Me: Creating Distinct Spaces to Support Student Wellness and Mental Health

Alison Downey  
Valparaiso University  
Rachael Muszkiewicz  
Valparaiso University  
Natalie Muskin-Press  
Valparaiso University

ABSTRACT
In January 2021, the Christopher Center Library at Valparaiso University commenced a Mental Wellness Initiative to address the growing rates of neurodiversity and mental health concerns that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative started as a simple plan to increase mental wellness resources and then blossomed into a collaborative, cross-departmental approach to offering wellness spaces and programming within the library. The initial plan for the building was a single mindfulness space where students could relax and take a break from studies, but that quickly evolved into an initiative to include four unique spaces within the library, with one wellness space on each floor. In order to be cognizant of the culture of each floor and not disrupt the students who frequently use it, keeping these environments unique was essential for the process. The ability to create these spaces on each floor was greatly enhanced by collaboration with the university counseling center. Entering the second full semester that the spaces had been available for student use, vital feedback was collected from students. Though initial purchases were selected by the library and counseling center, moving forward, the initiative will be student-led based on feedback and focus groups. Throughout the entirety of the project, multi-faceted resources and spaces have been paramount to continuing the mission. With the rise in the neurodivergent student population, these spaces provide a non-judgmental and cost free space to help alleviate the stress of academic life.

INTRODUCTION
Valparaiso University is a small, private university serving undergraduate and graduate students located in northwest Indiana. The Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources sits in the center of campus and, in addition to the library, houses the Access and Accommodation Resource Center, the campus writing center, the Academic Success Center, the Grinders cafe, and an IT help desk, drawing a diverse population of students through its doors. The library consists of ten staff and administration and only seven faculty librarians. This may feel detrimental to embarking in new initiatives, but our small size allows us to more easily pivot to address student needs.

In January of 2021, the Dean of the Library charged two librarians to expand the resources available to students for mental wellness. After brainstorming, the librarians determined this project could expand beyond just resources, and we evolved it into its own enterprise. We first reached out to the counseling center to find best practices and see how the library could join the movement to support students’ mental wellness. The Counseling Center based their recommendations on the resources available in their own relaxation room as well as ways to expand access to other lesser-known mental health resources available to students. These recommendations came in three areas: The first was the recommendation of light therapy glasses
that allowed for ease of use and integration into the students’ study process at the library; the second was the expansion of stations hosting the TAO Connect (Therapy Assisted Online) (Benton et al. 2016) platform that allows student access to evidence-based CBT treatments and multiple different mental health screening tools such as the Beck’s Depression Scale, and finally, access to self-directed activities such as guided meditation, coloring sheets and fidget toys to allow students to engage in self-regulation as needed. The Counseling Center also highlighted the benefit of semi-private to private spaces to aid in the stabilization of increased anxiety or the prevention of panic attacks or acute distress (Bladek 2021; Brown 2018; Cavanagh et al. 2013). Our first iteration was to create a single space, but we soon evolved our plan to create distinct spaces throughout the entire library. In past informal observations of student use, we noted that many students had a favorite library floor that they used almost exclusively. This is likely due to the unique environment of each of the floors. For example, the first floor is the loudest floor, whereas the third and fourth floors are designated quiet floors and have a calmer atmosphere. Students gather on the first floor for group studying, to pick up a coffee or snack at the cafe, or visit other academic partners housed within the building. Secondly, as a space, the library is not exclusive to academic pursuits. It is not uncommon for students to gather at the library for socializing purposes, taking breaks, and adding spaces for mental wellness, demonstrating our commitment to the student holistically (Hinchcliffe and Wong 2010). The positive impact of taking breaks has been well documented (Bennion et al. 2018; Blasche et al. 2021; Hoover et al. 2022; Sonnentag et al. 2017).

We aimed to instill a culture that was supportive as well as proactive. The idea of creating distinctive spaces on each floor of the library had two primary goals: (1) to make the spaces easily accessible and distinct to the ethos of each floor and (2) to demonstrate how the library can offer more than academic assistance. We want the library to be a place where they can find research help, to be sure, but knowing that this is not the primary reason why students may use the building, we want them to be comfortable in their choice. We started thinking of how the library could provide that level of comfort— in essence, how to become the campus’s living room.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on students’ mental wellness. In many cases, students were abruptly relocated back to their homes away from campus. Affected by these transitions, over 30% of students reported a negative impact on their mental health (Conrad 2021; Witteveen 2023; Zhu 2021). Statistically, nearly a quarter (23%) of young adults have experienced symptoms of anxiety and or depression in 2022 (National Center for Health Statistics 2022). As campuses cautiously reopened, it quickly became evident that mental health and wellness would need to be addressed by the university. According to an April 2021 survey from the American Council on Education, the “mental health of students” was the most frequently cited pressing issue by college and university presidents (Taylor et al. 2021). Additionally, according to Salimi et al. (2023), “Many college students need help with their mental health challenges but are often reluctant to get it or unsure how to commence the process” (2023:47). As the prevalence of mental health difficulties on campus and the expectations for more resources increases, many colleges and universities have moved towards a more holistic view of wellness.

Student expectations for more resources expand beyond the responsibilities of university counseling centers and health centers and demand a collaborative approach across campus. Though counseling services are broadly offered on campuses and produce positive results, individual counseling to large numbers of students may not be feasible, thus requiring additional interventions (Brown 2018). This need makes academic libraries a prime place to house mental wellness spaces and resources. Academic libraries are often centrally located, visited by a diverse population, and, in most cases, have longer open hours than other academic buildings (Benedetti et al. 2020; Bladek 2021; Brewster and Cox 2022). In addition to the unique position on campus, libraries are not affiliated with any particular group and thus are seen as “an inclusive and impartial space” (Brewster and Cox 2022:34). The mere fact that the patronage of the library is diverse broadens accessibility to mental wellness resources to a population that may not normally seek out such resources as well as offers a de-stigmatized, neutral location. Students who may feel uncomfortable visiting
The Library Cares About Me

a campus counseling center for fear of an attached stigma can easily access the library without any perceived scrutiny. As summarized by Ramsay and Aagard (2018), “Academic librarians are natural connectors, guiding their users to not only resources, but also connecting them to people, services, and spaces that can provide assistance” (p. 334); the library is an ideal space to meet these needs. The addition of spaces to promote relaxation or mental wellness is not a new concept. For several years, libraries have added temporary spaces within the building to offer refuge during midterms and finals. During these high-stress times, libraries often host a variety of programs and activities to promote “de-stressing.” Events such as yoga and therapy dog visits, as well as passive activities such as coloring, puzzles, and leisure reading are frequently used as resources to help students cope with their stress (Casucci and Baluchi 2019; Cox 2022).

Montgomery and Miller (2011) successfully predicted that the intrinsic role of the library is as a place rather than the traditional storehouse of resources or the only place to get research help. Students no longer need to visit the library building for resources due to the library’s virtual services, but we would like them to want to visit. Ray Oldenburg (1999) coined the term “third place” in his seminal work *The Great Good Place*, meaning the place outside of work or home where people chose to go. This third place is a place of comfort, where one might build a unique community and hopefully find a space to relax. It is informal, and there is no set time to be there and no schedule to be kept (Oldenburg 1999).

To expand on the initiatives of wellness in the libraries, many institutions have added dedicated spaces or resources to their library to promote holistic wellness. For example, starting in 2014, the University of Warwick library offered a variety of wellness services to their students. Their initiative featured crafts, physical activities such as yoga and stationary bikes, music lessons, and visits from therapy dogs (Brewerton and Woolley 2016). The Louisiana State University Library opened their “Relaxation Room” in 2016. The room was envisioned to host “puzzles, games, coloring sheets and origami materials” and act as a place where students can “relax, connect with other students, and retreat from the stress of academia” (Morgan 2020:104). The West Campus Library at Tulsa Community College dedicated a space with soft lighting to promote peaceful moods, and the library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign created their “meditation rooms,” which encourage students to embark on meaningful activities such as yoga, self-regulation, prayer, or mindfulness between classes (Pionke 2020; Watcher 2018). Additional resources and stress-relieving activities popular in academic libraries include but are not limited to Lego® Stations, Zen gardens, Play-Doh® availability, napping spaces and gratitude jars (Rourke 2020:13; Wise 2018).

Trends in retention are frequently studied and explore how higher education institutions can improve student success and retention, especially within the first year. Studies have shown that libraries and library programming can offer a positive effect on student retention (Bell 2008; DeVille and Sughrue 2023; Jones and Mastrorilli 2022; O’Kelly 2017; Oliveira 2018; Soria et al. 2013). Additionally, as stated by Nance (2022), “A growing number of studies have identified an undeniable link between student mental health distress or ill-being and lower academic achievement and student retention (p. 166).” Studies have also shown a link between improving student well-being, their sense of belonging on campus, and retention, especially in the first year (Kahu et al. 2022; Olfert et al. 2022; Saunders-Scott et al. 2017). Wellness initiatives include both programming and spaces, and libraries frequently try to design their spaces around student needs. When libraries take student needs into account, these “unique spaces contribute significantly to student retention, success, and completion and allow an advocacy for potentially underserved and underrepresented students” (Godfrey et al. 2017:376). Designing wellness spaces in an academic library could help foster this sense of belonging and help to improve student well-being. The evidence shows that libraries combining mental wellness initiatives could have a positive effect on student retention and are well worth the investment.

**CASE STUDY**

**Process of Creating the Spaces**

Student stress does not follow a calendar. The Library provides students with stress relief programs during our DeStress week before finals each semester. These
events historically have been well-attended and well-received, therefore extending some de-stress events beyond a week, and creating unique spaces showed our increased dedication to support student mental health. We wanted to provide some level of stress relief throughout the year. We researched and collaborated with the University Counseling Center, the student group Active Minds, the Campus Suicide Prevention Advocacy Group and the Social Work Department and grew in our understanding of how to support students holistically. We began our research into wellness spaces at other academic libraries.

Our argument for such spaces in our library was that the Christopher Center is one of the major hubs on campus where almost all students find themselves at some point during the semester—it seemed like the most logical location. The University Counseling Center, while in demand, is located in a more discrete and isolated location. With the late hours the library is open, combined with how many students in the building may be experiencing some sort of stress and anxiety around college life, these spaces have the opportunity to reach students effectively and efficiently and at a more opportune time than any other campus location. Creating a space for reflection and re-centering is important for our students and encourages them to take a break in a way that does not require much more than walking a few feet. It also provides them with the opportunity to try out and utilize resources they may not have sought on their own. By removing obstacles such as finances or time, we are more likely to expose students to evidence-based activities that can continue to help them even as they graduate and leave campus. After we put together the specifics of what we thought would work best for our students and our space, our proposal had to go through several levels of approval.

To change the purpose of any space in the library requires the approval of the university’s space planning committee. In order to make our best case to the committee, we put together an extensive packet that included detailed explanations of rationale, funding, timeline, impact statements and purposes, and collaborations, all backed up with references. We described each space and the possible reconfigurations and changes we wanted to include, making a quick visual mockup of what each space would look like.

While we thought our intentions were clear and unassailable, there were two areas of pushback. The university space planning committee had concerns (such as having computers on quiet floors and the stations blocking window access) about some of the proposed changes, but we addressed those concerns with additional changes, but we addressed those concerns with additional changes, but we addressed those concerns with additional research and statements from the Assistant Director of Prevention and Wellness Education and the Director of Counseling Services/Professor of Psychology and formal approval was granted. The second instance of pushback was from within the library, which included anticipated student complaints, extra workload, and overall trepidation of changing spaces. After these concerns came to the surface, we addressed them directly. Using what we had put together in the space planning packet to demonstrate the benefits and ensure the workload would fall to the initiating librarians, we were able to alleviate the concerns. Since the wellness initiative has been put into place, these initial concerns have not come to fruition.

Initially, purchases were funded by a grant, from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which was awarded to the University Counseling Center and shared with the library. We also received an additional internal grant from the Valparaiso University Guild, an organization affiliated with the university that gives funds to support the students’ physical and spiritual welfare. Through careful budgeting and the reuse of previously acquired materials, we have managed to remain within budget thus far. For example, rather than purchasing new soft seating, we repurposed some from elsewhere in the building, and we used computers from university surplus. The Dean of the Library is also committed to this wellness initiative and has set aside funding for its maintenance.

**Description of the Spaces**

Using retention trends with wellness spaces as a selling point, we raised the stakes by requesting to create distinct wellness spaces on all four floors of our library, something not found in the literature. This was a selling point for internal and external buy-in. Not only would this allow students to not have to travel from the floor they may be on to take a wellness break, but it would give several different

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1 Funds were received under grant number 1H79SM048093 from SAMHSA. The views, opinions and content of this publication are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of CMHS, SAMHSA, or HHS, and should not be construed as such.
options for wellness breaks, from a potentially loud play space to a virtually silent individual station for meditation; nothing had to change in the environment to accommodate the spaces. Having these wellness spaces fully integrated onto every floor also helps to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health – these spaces are not hidden away but normalized.

As previously mentioned, the first floor is the library’s loudest floor due to its collaborative nature. It holds the media and leisure reading collections as well as other building partners. In order to fit in with this noisy and collaborative environment, the play space was placed here. This wellness space includes a Lego® table and a large selection of tabletop games, which were selected by student suggestions (see Figure 1). The materials selected support the social environment where students can interact with each other freely. Since this area borders the Access and Accommodations office, staff were consulted to make sure this play space would not impede their duties. Students have been observed playing the tabletop games, including checking them out and moving them to other floors. The Lego® table also gets quite a bit of use.

The second floor is the library’s most visible floor, where the circulation desk, library classrooms, and most librarian offices are located. It is also the primary entrance into the library, and it is connected to the Arts & Sciences building, which is heavily trafficked. It is not a quiet floor, yet it is also not as noisy as the first floor, and, most importantly, it had a decent amount of space that could be used for wellness. The library’s microform room was an enclosed
space close to the circulation desk. The need for microform has dwindled, and the room still contains cabinets of microform, but it was otherwise an open space. We seized the opportunity to turn this underutilized space into a more comforting environment tailored for relaxation. After re-homing the microform reading machine and computer, we reconfigured the space with the purpose of making it into the “library's living room.” We reused tables, soft seating, and lamps from around the library and added Moon Pods®, fluorescent light covers, blankets, sound machines, a Zen garden, a light therapy lamp, soft lighting with floor lamps, coloring, and mindfulness sheets (see figure 2). Students frequently use the room for studying as well as relaxing; what we have observed them using the most is the soft lighting.

The third and fourth floors have the same configuration, as they are the library’s quiet floors, and the wellness space matches this volume. These spaces are the smallest ones developed and fit within a small area of the floor’s alcove (see Figure 3).

Each station consists of a smaller table, chair, and a desktop computer locked onto TAO Connect (Therapy Assistance Online, offering meditation and mindfulness exercises), to which the university has a subscription. Because we wanted to keep the ethos of the quiet floor (which is completely student self-policed), the computer has a set of headphones permanently attached. The space also has aesthetic wellness components, such as a salt lamp, artificial succulents, and artwork. Unlike the first

Figure 3: The identical third and fourth floor station includes mindfulness activities in a quiet space.

Figure 4: Lego® table engagement over the period of a few months.
and second floors, there was not an immediate initial plan for the third and fourth floors. However, having spaces for individual students is important for the initiative, and creating small stations on the quiet floors was ideal for this.

Every floor has two things in common: a binder featuring guided mindfulness worksheets, meditations, and music (links to on-theme Spotify playlists) and a “Box of Breaktime Fun.” The box contains items for a quick distraction (fidget poppers and other toys, stress balls, aroma putty, motivational cards) and for practicality (earplugs). For a breakdown of the spaces, including reasoning, costs and usage, see Appendix A.

**Student Response**

In attempts to determine what resources are needed and desired by students, we collected and analyzed feedback and usage data.

The first iteration of data was collected through ethnographic observation. We created a schedule of walkbys to gauge how many students were using the spaces at various times. There were noticeable limitations to this method, considering we were only able to record observations Monday through Friday during general working hours, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. We conducted scheduled walkbys for two months, walking past four times a day (10:15 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m., 4:30 p.m.). Due to limited staffing, we were unable to observe all four floors, so we opted to observe the first and second floors as those spaces are more group oriented. We wanted to respect the privacy of those using the individual stations.

In our observational walkbys, the first floor was the most difficult to observe student use. In 148 total walkbys, we only observed students actively at the space 2% of the time. However, we did document changes to the Lego® Table (evidence that pieces had been moved or added) with photographs and determined that the space was being engaged at a much higher rate than observed (see Figure 4).

The second floor was the most likely to find student use during walkbys. Of the 148 observed times, students were occupying the space 57% of the time. As previously mentioned, limitations to this method did not take into
account evening or weekend use and only accounted for a small portion of the day. Additionally, due to limited staffing, there were occasions when the scheduled time was missed or delayed.

After collecting observational data about how the spaces were used, we generated a passive survey (Appendix B) that was located in all four of the wellness locations. The IRB approved survey inquired about general demographic information, whether students had used more than one space in the library, which space they used the most/least, how much time was spent in the space, what was the draw of the space, what would bring them in more often, their thoughts about mental health spaces in the library, and what other resources they would like to see in the spaces. The survey was available for six weeks at each space, and once the students filled them out, they brought them to the circulation desk, where they received a small sensory toy for participating.

The survey conducted used demographic information to determine the population using the spaces. Thirty-nine responses were received (see table 1). The results showed that freshman and sophomore students were represented the most as using the space 35.9% and 28.2% respectively. Upperclassmen (juniors, seniors, and graduate students) made up the remaining 35.9% of survey respondents. We are hopeful that the higher rate of use by freshmen and sophomore students may be useful for student retention since freshman are the most vulnerable for attrition during breaks and semesters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Years of Students</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We were also curious if all four spaces would be justified in their creation or if students would be drawn to the largest and most elaborate space. The survey responses indicated that all four spaces were utilized by students (see Figure 5). Though the second floor space was the most used, the results indicated that there were students who preferred and used others, or responded that they used multiple spaces equally. This correlates with our initial intention that having unique spaces corresponding to the ethos of each floor would promote student use. In fact, 56% of survey takers indicated that they used exclusively one space in the library.

We also received qualitative feedback from students on how they responded to the library offering the dedicated mental wellness spaces (see table 2). It was clear that students appreciated having these spaces in the library, compared to other places on campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you feel about the dedicated mental wellness spaces being available in the library?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“College can be very stressful and having a place to relax in the middle of all this chaos is like a privilege.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think it’s great because it is easier to access and it normalizes taking care of your mental health.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I like it better in the library because I am always here and [it’s] less obvious if you need help with mental health.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“These spaces allow me to do things on my own time, my own way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It feels a lot more accessible and less intimidating to go in the library than the counseling center.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s great to have them in the first place, but it would be better to have them everywhere.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I love it here because most students come here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think it is a great place because students don’t feel intimidated to come here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I love that it starts to de-stigmatize anxieties and stress.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Student moods after using spaces.

Figure 7. Reasons for visiting the space.
At the end of spring semester 2023, a second IRB approved survey (Appendix C) was made available to students who utilize the spaces. The intention of this survey was to determine if the spaces affected the moods of the students who used them, in addition to more detailed data on how long students spent in the spaces and why they visited the area on that particular day. The survey was set up as a pictorial Likert scale ranging from a red unhappy face (1) to a bright green smiling face (5) for the first two questions. The first Likert smiling scale inquired how the student was feeling prior to visiting the wellness space, while the second scale inquired how the student felt after spending time in the area. The third question inquired how much time the student spent there during the specific visit and the fourth and final question offered multiple choice answers on what brought them to the space for the visit in question.

Once again, the survey was placed in each space, and the students would take the completed survey to the circulation desk for a prize. The second survey was administered for two weeks at the end of the spring semester for two main reasons. The first reason was to space the two surveys a semester apart and ideally eliminate survey fatigue. Secondly, based on past experience, near the final exam period, a more concentrated number of students visit the space, therefore expanding the population of those who could complete the survey. By the end of the spring semester, 17 responses were collected. Despite a small sample size, we received responses directly from our target audience. The results found that 94% of participants cited that their moods improved while using the wellness spaces in the library (see Figure 6). Only one respondent indicated that their mood neither improved nor deteriorated, but overall rated their mood at a four out of five.

The second inquiry was how much time students spent in the spaces in order to improve their mood. The large majority (65%) of survey participants responded that they visited the area between 0-15 minutes and their moods improved. 24% of students preferred to spend more time in the space, citing that they spent more than one hour in the space.

The third data point we surveyed was why students enjoy visiting the space. Students were invited to select as many of the provided responses as they liked as well as write in “other” reasons not listed. 76% of the students cited that they used the space to take advantage of the atmosphere (soft lighting, soft seating and decor). A close second, 65% of respondents stated that they visited the space to change their mood (see Figure 7).

One outcome of the spaces and the student responses was unexpected. Despite taking on more work and responsibility, the librarians responsible felt a boost in our own morale. At a time when we were taking on a higher workload, and likely to be susceptible to vocational awe we instead felt re-energized (Agostino and Cassidy 2019; Ettarh 2018).

We recognize the limitations of our small sample size and would like to continue to gather additional data for future research. However, we do feel the data we have has high salience due to surveying the highly specific and targeted population of students opting into the spaces. This decision led to data collection that was more akin to a focus group than a survey of the general population of patrons, many who may not be aware of, or currently in need of, the wellness spaces. Data collection began immediately, as we needed real-time student feedback to continue to develop the initiative.

Figure 8: Interactive displays: Post-it® Art Gallery (left) and Post-it® Positivity (right).
Discussion

One priority when creating these spaces was ensuring that students’ opinions, needs and desires would remain the benchmark for future developments. While we build on previous knowledge and expertise, we also honor students’ own knowledge about what they require. Therefore, internal changes that the students were making in the spaces were also noted, adjusted, and, in some cases, funded to make sure the spaces had a high impact for students. When the spaces were first opened for student use, we observed that some of the decor was moved to different places. Initially, we returned items to their previous locations, but within a week, students relocated items to desired locations. For example, when we noticed a salt lamp was continuously being moved to a different floor, we purchased another to have one in both locations.

A second goal was to ensure that the spaces remained original and updated. We have accomplished this in the following ways: adding new resources, cycling resources, and adding semester-long displays. The library frequently adds new sensory toys to the various locations and replaces items that are missing. Even a simple addition of adding copies of a new coloring sheet has a high return on investment. As for cycling, once a semester, new mindfulness worksheets are added to the binders, and worksheets that are unused are saved to be reintroduced in future semesters. Lastly, in the second-floor wellness space, a semester-long “display” is created via student participation. The first semester display boasted a “Post-it® Art Gallery,” whereas the second semester hosted “Post-it® Positivity” (see Figure 8).

Both displays were highly interactive and well-received. Display topics will be changed each semester with the intention of keeping students engaged.

Due to the nature of resources being freely available and not restricted, the initiative accounted for an expected amount of loss of materials. Some materials were intended to be taken and used (i.e., coloring sheets, mindfulness worksheets, earplugs, self-care cards); however, certain materials were intended to stay and be available for use by multiple students (aroma putty, sensory toys). To track and budget for the loss of materials and consumables, a bi-weekly inventory of the spaces is completed. This inventory period also ensures that spaces remain relevant and offer adequate resources. Beneficial to the library, conducting an inventory also acts as an indicator of what resources are often used and in which spaces. This data can help with future planning, expansions, and adjustments.

Some maintenance of the spaces falls directly into the responsibility of the two librarians leading the initiative. This includes the hygiene of the area and washing the soft-lines such as covers for the Moon Pods®, blankets, and pillows. The soft-line materials are washed weekly, and one of the best investments was purchasing backup blankets and covers so that laundry could be completed over a weekend without leaving the spaces void of resources.

FUTURE PLANS

The next step for the library’s initiative is converting two study rooms on the third and fourth floors into semi-private wellness spaces. Based on student feedback, students called for additional spaces that were more private. Plans for these new spaces include soft seating, sound-reducing egg chairs, sensory resources and TAO Connect stations. These spaces could be useful for students with telehealth appointments, as there is a door and the ability to take a private call. These space proposals have passed the campus space planning committee and are awaiting funding and free time to transform them. Once the new spaces are established, the counseling center will help market these spaces as telehealth-friendly. Future plans also include gathering more student data, including hosting a focus group and assessing more student use of the spaces.

The library’s wellness spaces have been held up as a model for the rest of the university for those who want similar spaces in their departments/buildings, as the Dean of the Library has been told on multiple occasions during administrative meetings. Currently, there are similar spaces in the Brauer Museum of Art, the Office of Multicultural Programs, and the Counseling Center, with the prospect of new spaces in the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing and Health Professions, and the building that houses the Social Work, Education, and Psychology departments. We hope that more collaboration can occur, even when the spaces are not inside the library.

BEST PRACTICES

The most useful tool in creating wellness spaces in a library is student input. Student input should be sought early on in the planning process to ensure that the spaces represent their needs. This can be achieved through
working with student groups, gathering input from student employees and offering small incentives for participation in surveys. Student input can come in a variety of forms, which may include students changing the spaces to meet their preferences. Allowing these changes gives the students ownership over their level of comfort. Students also tend to appreciate finding the creative and unexpected in their library. Items like Moon Pods® or toys such as a Lego® table may seem out of place in an academic library, but this appeals to their desire to unwind.

A second consideration is space in the library. While real estate in the library may be limited, this does not have to be an obstacle. Inventory spaces that are not frequently used and consider repurposing the space for student use. This may lead to an opportunity to prioritize lower priority projects that impact space. For example, we were able to create 15 feet² of space by weeding cassette tapes from the collection, a project that had been avoided. Looking at the library holistically through a student-centered lens, it is possible to see wellness space in unexpected places. This space does not have to be large, even using a space the size of a table and chair is sufficient. Any space is preferable to none.

It is very important to the library and this initiative that all of these spaces were not restricted; we wanted to remove any barriers that might continue stigmatizing mental health. This is being taken into account with our new semi-private spaces in former study rooms. This commitment extends beyond students to anyone who can use the space. All of our wellness spaces are open to all patrons of our library: students, faculty, staff, and community members. We have observed that most of our users are students, which is unsurprising as they are our main constituents. Faculty and staff are aware of the spaces, but we have seen little to no use from these populations. Due to our status as a private academic library, we have not seen many community members use the spaces, but they would certainly be welcome.

Funding can range from minimal to expansive and can feasibly fit any library's budget. If the budget is minimal, high-impact, cost-effective resources could include wellness/mindfulness worksheets, coloring sheets with art supplies, a resource guide, and repurposed soft seating and lighting. Seeking external funding can help make the case for these spaces with library administration, as well as being able to afford additional resources outside the scope of library funding. Opportunities for outside funding could include state funding, internal university grants and awards, or discretionary funds from other departmental partners. Wellness spaces can easily use supplies and resources already owned by the library. From what we have observed, we would have made a difference in the second floor space with only the addition of soft lighting, which was a total cost of $70. The goal of this initiative is not to simply provide fancy wellness resources but rather to give a dedicated environment for student wellness. This demonstrates that the library cares for the students not just academically but holistically.

Be prepared to make a case with evidence not only for library administration, but other university entities as well. There can be many bureaucratic steps, such as approval from campus administration and university space planning committees. In making our case, we found that a simple visual mockup of our plan for the space and citing recent literature supporting similar initiatives helped the committee(s) understand what we wanted to do. This collected evidence can also be helpful when making the case internally in the library.

Avoiding silos is important for a wellness initiative. Naturally, working with mental health providers on campus can provide evidence-based practices and offer extensive knowledge that might not be in a librarian’s skill set. Do not limit this only to the counseling center—act broadly to include collaborators, including departments such as social work or psychology, access and accommodations, student groups and other mental-health-focused groups. For example, we worked with Valpo’s Campus Suicide Prevention Advocacy Group with funding and resources.

Not everything will go as expected. Early on in our initiative, we purchased light therapy glasses on recommendation from the counseling center. Due to the price point, the library needed to place them on reserve, and students had to check them out. This necessary barrier led to low circulation. To combat this, we purchased two less expensive light therapy lamps that were both barrier-free (located in the second and fourth floor spaces) and easier to use. Once again, evolution is key; be prepared to sunset materials and ideas that do not work with your population.
CONCLUSION

Overall, we learned that students appreciated any efforts on the library’s part to promote mental wellness, and realistically, any level of dedicated space is worth the investment. These spaces can easily be added to any library if the determination is present; the scope or cost of the space does not have to be grand. Something as small as providing a blanket can have a meaningful impact on students. Despite the initial resistance, the spaces have been well-utilized and worth the challenge. Students appreciated all the distinct wellness spaces within the library, and as shown in our data, many of the students were loyal to their preferred spaces. Students also appreciated that these spaces were within the library, citing them for ease of access and de-stigmatization of mental health care. Our goal was this normalization. As one student said, “I think it’s great because it is easier to access, and it normalizes taking care of your mental health.”

This new and changed environment, focused on mental health, can be where the students can find comfort and belonging. As another student stated, “I really enjoy having these spaces on campus as I feel like it shows how much Valpo cares about their students.”

REFERENCES


## APPENDIX A. BREAKDOWN OF SPACES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floor / Ethos</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Materials and Cost</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First floor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ethos: Collaborative, High-volume, social</td>
<td>Legos®, toys and board games support the collaborative and social environment where students can interact with each other freely.</td>
<td>Lego® table: $99&lt;br&gt;Storage ottomans for Legos®: $20/ottoman&lt;br&gt;Board games: $25 (average)&lt;br&gt;Fidgets: $1/fidget (average)&lt;br&gt;Mindfulness binder: $2/binder</td>
<td>High use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second floor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ethos: Collaborative, High-traffic, Mid-volume</td>
<td>The second floor had the largest available space which is also the most secluded. This makes it possible to solely use soft-lighting and offer comfortable and cozy resources.</td>
<td>Moon Pods®: $299/chair&lt;br&gt;Sound machines: $30&lt;br&gt;Soft lighting: $15 (average)&lt;br&gt;Zen garden: $5&lt;br&gt;Zen Water Art Board: $28&lt;br&gt;Repurposed soft seating: $0&lt;br&gt;Fidgets: $1/fidget (average)&lt;br&gt;Mindfulness binder: $2/binder&lt;br&gt;Pillows/Blankets: $5/pillow or blanket&lt;br&gt;Light therapy lamp: $30/lamp</td>
<td>High use&lt;br&gt;Medium use&lt;br&gt;Very high use&lt;br&gt;High use&lt;br&gt;High use&lt;br&gt;High use&lt;br&gt;High use&lt;br&gt;High use&lt;br&gt;Medium use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third / Fourth floor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ethos: Quiet, Individual study</td>
<td>These spaces are located in quiet spaces in the library, thus they need to be suited for individuals.</td>
<td>TAO Connect: University pays for subscription&lt;br&gt;Mindfulness binder: $2/binder&lt;br&gt;Fidgets: $1/fidget (average)</td>
<td>Medium use&lt;br&gt;Medium use&lt;br&gt;Very high use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items at circulation desk</strong></td>
<td>These are more expensive items that need to be checked out.</td>
<td>Glasses: $200/pair&lt;br&gt;Weighted Blanket: $50/blanket</td>
<td>Low use&lt;br&gt;Medium use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B. FEEDBACK ON USE OF SPACE

1. What is your role on campus?
   - Student
   - Staff
   - Faculty
   - Other:

2. If you are a student, what is your current year?
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - Graduate
   - N/A

3. Have you used at least one (1) of the mindfulness space in the library?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Have you used more than one (1) of the mindfulness spaces in the library?
   - Yes
   - No

5. Which space did you use the MOST?
   - First Floor: Interactive area [Legos®, Boardgames]
   - Second Floor: Mindfulness space [Soft seating, soft lighting, sound machine]
   - Third Floor: TAO Connect Stations
   - Fourth Floor: TAO Connect Stations

6. How much time did you spend in the space?

7. What features draw you to this space?

8. Which space did you use the LEAST?
   - First Floor: Interactive area [Legos®, Boardgames]
   - Second Floor: Mindfulness space [Soft seating, soft lighting, sound machine]
   - Third Floor: TAO Connect Stations
   - Fourth Floor: TAO Connect Stations

9. What would bring you to this space more often?

10. How do you feel about the dedicated mental wellness spaces being available in the library as opposed to other spaces on campus like the Counseling Center?

11. What are additional mental wellness resources and tools that you feel would be useful to other VU community members that the library could provide?

Thank you for your participation! Please bring back this survey to the circulation desk, and pick out a small reward as a thank you!
APPENDIX C. EFFECT OF SPACE USE

1. Prior to coming to this wellness space today, how were you feeling?

2. After spending time in this wellness space, how are you feeling?

3. How much time did you spend in this wellness space today?
   
   0-15 minutes  15-30 minutes  30-60 minutes  1 hour or more

4. What brought you into this wellness space today? Select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>__ To relax</th>
<th>__ To take a nap</th>
<th>__ To meet with classmates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To take a break from studying</td>
<td>__</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use TAO Connect (3rd/4th</td>
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<tr>
<td>floor)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Had time between classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>To use Lego® Table (1st floor)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To study</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use board games</td>
<td>__</td>
<td></td>
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<td>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>To alleviate stress</td>
<td>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>To use the materials in the</td>
<td>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>space</td>
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<tr>
<td>To change my mood</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>To take advantage of the</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
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<tr>
<td>atmosphere</td>
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<td>__</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please describe below)</td>
<td>__</td>
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Wait, We’re Invited, Too? An Academic Social Justice Book Club for the Community (A Case Study)

Amanda Boyer  
Susquehanna University
Amir El-Chidiac  
Susquehanna University

ABSTRACT

Political tensions, racial reckoning, and rising book challenges have led to deeper polarization in the United States, especially in Pennsylvania, where there is already an even divide between liberals and conservatives. The increasing division led two librarians from the Susquehanna University Blough-Weis Library (2021) to initiate a Social Justice Book Club. This club aimed to unite the campus and local communities to grapple with social justice issues in a safe environment. Librarians had concerns when starting the club due to the regional tensions. Still, they were determined to find a way to safely allow everyone involved to learn more about social justice topics. In addition to safety concerns, the librarians had to consider the best way to gain interest and participation in a group intended for these different audiences, such as what type of material to read, where to meet, and more. There was initial success followed by hurdles that shaped the future of the book club. We hope sharing these challenges will inform others how to implement similar book clubs at their institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Book challenges have not yet hit Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, but are becoming uncomfortably close to home. The librarians in our area have been holding their breath just waiting for it to happen as one of the groups behind many of these challenges, Moms for Liberty, has a local chapter in a neighboring county (Scicchitano 2021). The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled Moms for Liberty a hate group. In other areas, Moms for Liberty members have spewed racist, homophobic, and transphobic views, harassed community members, and pushed for the removal of diverse books from shelves (Swenson 2023). There was a 38% increase in book titles challenged between 2021 and 2022, and most of the books targeted “were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color” (American Library Association 2023a). All of this comes on the heels of the 2020 racial reckoning after the death of George Floyd and the rise of Black Lives Matter protests.

In recent years, our local area has seen an increase in hate crimes, from the defacement of our campus’ Black Lives Matter Banner to a local grocery store posting signs implying LGBTQ folks are not welcome there (Green 2023; Krize 2020). In July of 2020, this local grocery store posted a sign claiming, “members of the LGBTQ community ‘spread deadly diseases and sickness’” (Associated Press and Strawser 2020). The nearby Bloomsburg Fair made an online post mocking Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine by sharing a picture of a man dressed as a woman in a dunk tank; the post sarcastically thanked her for raising funds and intended to demean Dr. Levine, a transgender woman (Associated Press and Strawser 2020). These incidents and more occurred in our local area. As librarians in the community, we are passionate about social justice and inclusion: one of us was born and raised here, and another one of us is queer and transgender. These events helped fuel our desire to make a difference.
All these factors galvanized us to form the Social Justice Book Club. This book club is a collaboration between the public library (Snyder County Libraries) and the university library. It is open to students, staff, and faculty of the university and the local community. The book club aims to select books written by marginalized authors to give readers a new perspective. The meetings are meant to be a safe space for people from the campus and local communities to come together to learn about social justice issues. We even partnered with local businesses to cater for the events to help strengthen the “town-gown” relations. We hope to inspire others to do similar work in their communities by sharing our story.

BACKGROUND

Susquehanna University is a small liberal arts college in rural central Pennsylvania. Our university has about 2,200 undergraduate students. Many will remember that Pennsylvania was the deciding state in the most recent presidential election. Driving off campus, Confederate flags are displayed next to houses flying the Black Lives Matter flag. Tensions in the area have risen with the Trump administration and the country’s racial reckoning in 2020. Many residents passionately believe in the right to carry a firearm in public spaces, and this made us nervous as we began to think about our book club. Even if someone did not show up with a gun, there were other concerns, such as Moms for Liberty using this as a foot in the door to start book challenges in our county. We wanted to host the first meeting in the public library and rotate to various local restaurants. However, we also wanted our book club to be a safe place for people to learn and grapple with these issues with minimal risk. We felt that due to the ongoing pandemic, not everyone would be comfortable meeting in a restaurant, and we did not want attendees to feel pressured to buy something if they were unable to. We also could not promise security at any off-campus events. As we considered how our book club would function, we examined other examples of book groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of book clubs is a common one in libraries and communities. Books have always been an excellent tool for sparking discussions, and they can be a handy teaching tool when trying to bridge differences in a group. The studies we examined used book clubs for several reasons, but all had in common the desire to bring people together across differences. We were inspired by the University of Washington Tacoma’s Real Lit(eration): Reading for Social Justice, a library-run book club. The book club had many positive outcomes, such as students dialoging with people with differing opinions and marginalized students’ experience seeing themselves represented in literature (Bull and Kiciman 2021:95). However, there are other excellent models that, while not all focused on social justice, are still using books to invoke empathy in their readers.

About half the studies we encountered were from medical schools. Health sciences librarians at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill used a book club to safely allow students to explore the more challenging aspects of medical work, especially when it comes to caring for patients (Haley et al. 2019). Emergency medical interns at UCLA participated in a book club that boosted their communication skills, increased engagement with their residency programs, and built rapport with their peers, while medical students and faculty at Quinnipiac University established a book club for similar purposes (Jordan et al. 2021; Kilham and Griffiths 2017). A professor now at the University of West Chester created a book club, and students read The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks and Well: What We Need to Talk About When We Talk About Health. The professor of the class stated, “It seems that this combination of books, along with the small-group book club dynamic, created a perfect recipe for a shared learning experience where students could help one another to process and dive deeper into the issues of racism and social justice” (Rich 2021:328). In all these studies, participants felt comfortable discussing tough and sensitive topics within their book club. This level of comfort and safety is what we hoped to achieve in our social justice book club.

Of course, we are not the only organization fighting book bans and conservative agendas with a book club. Queer teachers formed an LGBTQ-inclusive book club for elementary and middle school teachers from across the U.S., and this book club enabled teachers to have intimate discussions about the stress of facing book bans (Ryan 2021). It was a place for teachers to dive deeper, learn new terminologies, share ideas, and listen to the experiences of other teachers. Library science graduate students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa started a book club to
support professional development, like how we pitched our book club to the faculty and staff of the university (Brown and Shaindlin 2021). Any profession that involves working with people requires empathy and understanding of others, and books can help strengthen these essential interpersonal skills. This is also why book clubs are great for college students preparing to enter the professional world. In addition to benefits to our campus community, we also found research that pointed to benefits for any community members wishing to participate.

Cognitive psychologists have found that reading literature increases empathy and social understanding (Oatley 2016). Additionally, the structure of book clubs differs from the traditional models of educational exchanges. Although there may be a moderator, each participant is seen as having something to offer to the group. Book clubs tend to be more egalitarian and less hierarchical. As a result, when care and intention are put into selecting texts, it creates a space where there is the possibility of transformation or expanding worldviews and understanding (Grenier et al. 2021:489). This collective meaning-making can be beneficial to organizations and team building as reading diverse texts “can mitigate the effect of othering” (Brown 2019:85). The research points to the potential benefits any participant in a book club can experience. Therefore, a book club seemed the perfect way to get various people thinking and talking about social justice issues in both our campus and local community.

PLANNING

Planning the book club was challenging. One of the biggest obstacles was determining the reading for the group. Students were so involved in other extracurriculars and already had full workloads. We were concerned, too, that students would not want to do additional reading. We ended up selecting Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe partially because it is a graphic novel. We believed students would be more willing to read a graphic novel than a traditional work of fiction or non-fiction. Graphic novels as a genre have skyrocketed in popularity. Between 2020 and 2021, sales of graphic novels rose 62% (Milliot 2022). Many of our students find graphic novels and comic books a welcome diversion from schoolwork. Combining shorter sentences with visual imagery engages the reader’s senses differently, and we felt it would be more accessible to community members, too, who may not be regular readers. Graphic novels feel less intimidating and can tackle complex topics by connecting emotionally with readers (Barter-Storm and Wik 2020:6). This emotional connection enables readers to have meaningful discussions about the themes in the graphic novel. Studies have also shown that English language learners benefit from reading graphic novels because they can contextualize language with and through the imagery (Erbel 2019). We felt this combined research made a graphic novel the perfect text for our first book.

We also selected Gender Queer because, in 2021, it was the most challenged book in the United States—and still was in 2022 (American Library Association 2023b). The book deals frankly with sexuality and gender identity and depicts menstrual blood and masturbation. Because of this, many groups have challenged it and deemed it obscene. However, a judge presiding over a court case in Virginia involving Gender Queer stated the book was not obscene and should not be censored (Tsur 2023). As we previously stated, graphic novels are popular with teens, and the most popular titles are often the most controversial titles simply because queer, trans, and BIPOC youth read them (MacDonald 2023:19). Book banning has become a polarizing political topic, and the increase in book challenges and outright bans has especially impacted books dealing with race, gender, and sexuality; the bans and challenges are framed as parental choice (Alter 2022). Graphic novels, like Gender Queer, are important for validating the experiences of young queer people in our country. Many queer young adults are seeking stories mirroring their experiences.

We knew this book would bring about lively discussions about the themes the author raised and the ethics of book banning.

Right before the semester started and after we selected this book, Republican politicians in our state wrote a letter to our governor urging him to censor Gender Queer and others from public schools. Congressman Fred Keller touted it as inappropriate even though he boasted of only opening the book and immediately closing it (Scicchitano 2022). As Fred Keller is from our local area, we knew people’s interests would be piqued by the book we selected. Our local newspaper called us shortly after we announced the book club and asked if they could attend the first meeting and write an article about it. They highly publicized our book selection as well as our reasons for choosing it to
counteract book bans (Moore 2022). The article encouraged the community to come to the meetings; however, this also led to more apprehensions about the safety of our attendees. We wanted residents to be aware of the book club, but we also did not want anyone showing up with violence or hate in their intentions.

The physical safety of our librarians, participants, and patrons in the library was a concern for us. There have been reports of people coming into libraries to protest drag story hours and patrons becoming enraged at certain books being included in the children's and young adult sections. In 2022, The Proud Boys, a neo-fascist far-right men's militant group, stormed a Drag Queen Story Hour in California at a Bay Area library. They screamed homophobic and transphobic slurs at the attendees and at Panda Dulce, the drag queen leading the reading, which frightened and traumatized attendees (Ravikumar 2022). We had to consider if something similar would happen at our book club's meetings.

When one of our librarians met with the director of our county's public library system, their director raised similar concerns. While she was supportive of collaboration, she expressed hesitation at hosting the event in their building. The library branch closest to the university did not have an enclosed room large enough to accommodate the book club, and the director worried about privacy for the attendees. If we held it at the public library, it would have to be in an open space, allowing anyone to hear the book club discussions. As we wanted the meetings to be safe for people to ask honest questions about queer and transgender issues, she felt this would make that difficult. Public librarians have been under immense pressure over the last several years. They have been threatened, harassed, and even doxed for promoting books conservative community members deem inappropriate. The public library was eager to market the program as a collaborative book club, but they worried about the possible fallout if they hosted it. They purchased copies of Gender Queer but shelved them in the adult section, and they are not the only library to make this decision. Recently, the Cedar Grove Library moved Gender Queer to the adult section after residents issued complaints (Tsur 2023). We decided hosting the book club at Blough-Weis Library would allow for more privacy. We informed Campus Safety of our plans to hold a book group and asked them to check the library discreetly, as we did not want to make our BIPOC students feel more unsafe by having a visible security presence.

Once we determined our safety plan, we devised incentives to increase participation. We provided snacks and refreshments to draw in attendees and help students who wanted to participate but might worry about missing dinner before a night class. We partnered with a small business nearby that makes specialized cookies and cinnamon rolls. The business promoted our book club on their social media pages and inside their shop. To make the book club more financially accessible, we purchased six physical copies of Gender Queer, as well as the digital version of the book. These were in addition to the copies made available via the public library's collection. This enabled each participant to read the book without any monetary burden. The event was also co-sponsored and advertised by our Office of Inclusive Excellence, who offered faculty and staff professional development credits for participating in the book club. Faculty and staff at the university are highly encouraged to earn credits in this professional development program each semester, so this served as an incentive, specifically to entice faculty and staff.

After we had a plan to get people excited to participate, we worked on spreading the word. We announced the book club on Blough-Weis Library's Instagram page and flyers across campus. Our university's Marketing and Communications Department designed eye-catching flyers of a raised fist holding a book to grab people's attention, and in addition to posting the flyers on campus, the public library posted it in their branches and on their social media accounts. Our librarians contacted faculty members in the English and Creative Writing Department about the book club and asked them to share the information with their students as they have many students in the program who often engage in literary events. After putting in lots of work to promote the book club, we were excited to see the turnout.

RESULTS

The fall semester saw quite a bit of success. The first meeting took place during Banned Books Week, and one of our librarians presented resources on the rise in book challenges to open the meeting and provide context to the reason we chose Gender Queer. Around ten people were in attendance, including reporters from the local paper, students,
staff, faculty, and community members. Since our university was still experiencing low turnouts to events following the pandemic, we were happy we had this many people attend, especially as it was a diverse group of people of various genders, races, and religious identities. Although we did not take a formal poll of the participants’ ages, we estimate that participants were between the ages of twenty and seventy-five. The discussions were open and engaging, allowing everyone to feel safe sharing and learning based on the group’s experiences and backgrounds. To set a positive tone, we collectively produced group agreements such as communicating respectfully, understanding that we are all in various stages of awareness, and being kind. Regarding moderating the discussions, we rotated who led them each time. We prepared questions based on the previous week’s readings, which allowed conversations and reflections to flow naturally. Preparing a list of questions prevented awkward silences and too many irrelevant discussions. We also asked participants to share any questions they had about the text or general thoughts and feelings not yet touched on. We knew it was important to ask questions about the text, the author’s story, and questions promoting self-reflection. For instance, we asked questions like: Did the author’s gender journey make you reflect on your gender journey? Yes or no, why? This sparked some vulnerable sharing, and two participants stated that reading Kobabe’s story helped them empathize with the transgender people in their lives. Two participants shared how difficult puberty was for them and how much more difficult it must be for transgender youth experiencing gender dysphoria. As participants eagerly responded to the questions and consistently kept the conversation going, we felt this was a sign of our success. It was also evident everyone in attendance had prioritized reading the book, which was a huge win given how little time we felt people would have to read the book.

Though it is still in its early days, our book club has already attracted people in the local community who have relatives who are transitioning. When we read Maia Kobabe’s Gender Queer in the fall, one community member and one staff member attended to help them better understand the trans people in their lives. One of our community members and staff members attended to learn more about the trans experience; both attendees stated they wished to support their trans loved ones better. A faculty member said he was attending because he had not read anything written by a trans person. He stated that as a straight white cis man, he felt it was essential to educate himself, especially since a few of his students were trans. We did not have the participants take an official survey at the end because we feared even if it was anonymous, it might make some people hesitant to return. Again, with the tense political climate, we wanted to prioritize making people feel safe and welcome. This is also why when the local newspaper asked to report on the book club, we made it clear they could only photograph people from the back unless they were one of the library staff moderating the event (as we all agreed we were comfortable with this). However, we did keep track of the positive feedback we received from participants by writing it down and had a follow-up meeting where we discussed what we could have done differently to improve the book club. We also suspect there were several more people who read the book than who chose to attend the book club, as Gender Queer was the most checked out book that semester. We realized we would never find a meeting time to work for all the people interested in attending, so to have more people potentially engaging with the book than those who attended made us feel like we were sparking change in more people than we knew. We were fortunate to not have any pushback or negative reception to our book club. In fact, many faculty members expressed verbal interest in attending but were unable to attend due to other responsibilities. The students that attended were engaged and excited to be discussing a queer book. We also understand the political climate in the area is still conservative and plan to implement similar safety measures to protect our attendees.

**REFLECTION**

As there are often many events and activities co-occurring on college campuses, it can be challenging to compete for participation and attendance. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts for our spring book club series, all our meeting dates coincided with other major university events. Some of these events were even required for certain students to attend, which eliminated large groups of people from being able to come to our meetings. Though we had selected our dates well in advance, these other events were scheduled after our dates had been picked. To avoid this, we recommend checking your university’s
event calendar and with groups and offices that organize regular, large events. If students have mandatory events, checking those dates before planning your book club could prevent a low turnout.

We also recommend checking for any active book clubs at your institution. For example, our university's Violence and Intervention Prevention Center has a feminist-focused book club, which is already popular with students. This book club survived the pandemic and was still going strong when we conceived the social justice book club. Not all college students enjoy leisure reading, and few have time for it. Asking students to read a specific book and on a schedule for a book club does require extra work. Add that to another book club they can choose from, and the number of students who might participate lessens significantly. Because of this, we are talking with the VIP Center about combining our book clubs in the future to maximize attendance.

While faculty and staff were incentivized with the option to receive credits for the university's professional development program, none of them chose to pursue these credits as there were one-hour webinars and workshops offered in this same program that did not require them to read a book or meet more than once to earn credit. Some faculty and staff members still attended our book club, but they were not doing it for credit in the professional development curriculum. Because of this, we stopped offering credit for the spring semester.

As for attendance by the local community, we were aware that when we chose to have the meetings on campus, this would immediately deter some community members from attending. Like many college campuses, our campus has limited parking for visitors. We also knew that local people may not be as comfortable coming to campus since they may need to be more familiar with where our building is. Since, during the pandemic, community groups were not allowed on campus, we realized locals may still feel that sense of unwelcome. They can safely assume there will be more university folks there than those from the community, which can be intimidating. We are sure we saw fewer community members than we would have seen if we hosted the meetings downtown. In the future, if we continue to host the meeting on campus, we will include parking and walking directions for community members. Although our turnout fluctuated, we prided ourselves on getting people to read the book even if they could not attend the book club meetings.

CONCLUSION

As we enter another election year, we anticipate increasing local tension surrounding social justice issues. Times like these intensify the need for safe spaces to discuss and learn about social justice topics. Many of our students will be voting for the first time, but even for faculty, staff, and residents who have voted many times, living in a battleground state, there is more pressure to get out and vote. Social justice book clubs, like ours, provide a safer space to learn more about social justice issues before heading to the polls. Book clubs are sites of exchange and transformation and offer participants a non-hierarchical way to connect. Our book club was both a moderated and informal space for discussion, a relief from the more structured models of academic classes. It was powerful to witness faculty, students, and community members discussing Gender Queer and reflecting on their relationship to gender. It was also profoundly moving to see staff and community members show up to learn more about some of the issues transgender people face and to attend to become better allies to their loved ones. The Social Justice Book Club brought together an intergenerational group of people who, under normal circumstances, may not have interacted with one another. Through this book club, we listened to one another and challenged each other to think more deeply about gender, sexuality, and social justice. These conversations might grow more tense as the election approaches, but that is more reason to have a safe space where such a diverse group of people can learn more about these issues.

REFERENCES


Milliot, Jim. 2022. “Comics/Graphic Novels Sales Jumped


LIBRARIES are frequently viewed through a traditional perspective of passively providing information resources, but today’s most innovative college and university libraries have become so much more. When the editorial board issued a call for projects for the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, the librarians at Cal Poly Humboldt jumped at the opportunity to demonstrate this new reality through the lens of community efforts. Our librarian editorial team assembled and edited some of the best of what libraries have been doing so that these under-celebrated community efforts could reach the wider audience they deserve. We hope you enjoy what has been published here, and to our fellow librarians, that you are inspired to tackle challenges beyond your own campus walls.

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Robert Schimelpfenig

LOOKING AT THE PAST TO CHANGE THE FUTURE: SHOWCASING FEATURED COLLECTIONS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES, AND CO-CREATING
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