

Academic and Public Library Collaboration: Increasing Value by Sharing Space, Collections, and Services

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In the 2009 academic year the librarian faculty at Cuyahoga Community College began to formally assist the College in the development of a refreshed Information Literacy Assessment model and, along with their teaching faculty colleagues, to seek to incorporate information literacy into the College's official general education outcome goals. As part of this effort the college's librarians began to research ways that the library itself might be able to assist in the improvement of student retention and graduation rates. Review of the literature indicated a relationship between the depth of a library's collection, student retention, and graduation rates.

A Community College Library functioning like a traditional academic library¹ cannot fully inspire and engage students. Academic libraries serve the baccalaureate / graduate institution well given their need for and ability to collect rich diverse collections that support a wide array of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees. Community College accreditation standards favor currency of material over research value and coverage for two year degrees. Therefore Community Colleges are not required to fund their libraries to the same level as four-year university peers. Collection budgets are limited to curriculum support and, therefore, fail to completely create the "heart of the campus" feel that so many academic research libraries can rightly claim. This paper will demonstrate

various Public/Academic library collaborations (specifically in a Community College setting) and how they offer a low cost solution to diversify a Community College library collection while increasing student engagement, success, and usage of both partnering institutions. Our research is in its infancy but over time we hope to demonstrate a positive correlation between depth of collection, item circulation, visitor counts, student retention, and graduation rates. Every College department must work to contribute to student success. Libraries can make a strong contribution to these efforts by creating a more robust and interesting environment.

Reviewing various existing information literacy plans published by academic libraries across the country also led to the clear observation that libraries at most baccalaureate institutions offer extremely rich collections that inform, inspire, and entertain their patrons. The University Library of Indiana University—Purdue University (IUPUI) website states that their University Library features over 1,000,000 volumes and over 35,000 current periodicals. Such a vast collection is very likely to ensure that they meet or exceed their mission statement of being a transformative presence in their community, of opening doors to learning, discovery, and creativity.² Ohio State University libraries spend, annually, over 15 million dollars on library resources.³ Cleveland State University's

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Michael Schwartz Library held, according to their 2010 annual report, over 1,800,000 print volumes and featured a tiered usage policy that makes this collection available to the public and places the library on the path toward meeting their stated goal of creating the “urban academic library of the 21st century for the complete information support of all the university’s academic programs so that all students become critical and effective information users.”⁴ The typical academic library offers astonishing wealth to and is of incredible service to its community. Incoming freshmen, alongside PhD. candidates, have nearly limitless access to knowledge and can, driven by their initiative, explore almost any topic as deeply as their time allows. Furthermore, research shows that increased spending on library resources can have a positive impact on both student retention and graduation rates.⁵⁻⁷ As state funding becomes increasingly dependent on such success rates⁸ it becomes imperative that Community College libraries are aware of how they might make a viable contribution to this effort.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) a common mission of any Community College is to provide a venue for lifelong learning, to make higher education more accessible, and to offer a “comprehensive educational program.”⁹ Community Colleges, along with their libraries act, typically, like traditional academic institutions. Students are encouraged to enroll, to state a major course of study, and then finally to persevere toward graduation. Guidance counselors help students identify the course of study that most efficiently allows them to meet their individual goals. Librarians create collection plans designed to support the curriculum, students are given priority access to available technology, and electronic resources are largely only available to enrolled students, faculty and staff. And yet, upon closer scrutiny one finds the Community College library (and campus) vastly different from those of four-year institutions. These distinctions prevent a purely academic library model from succeeding in the Community College environment.

Community Colleges offer, in most programs, open enrollment thereby fulfilling their mission of granting access to higher education to anyone, regardless of their academic goals or other personal history. Peterson’s College Guide notes that, at present, only 77% of applicants to the University of Dayton are admitted. Similarly, the University of Nebraska—Lin-

coln only accepts 59% of its applicants.¹⁰ By contrast, and intentionally, Cuyahoga Community College is referenced as having a 100% acceptance rate and is classed by Peterson’s as “non-competitive.”¹¹ The value of higher education is present in both competitive and open enrollment institutions but it is critical that librarians recognize the differences between the two systems.

A lack of on campus housing may have a negative impact on student success.^{12,13} Students without on-campus housing disperse at the end of their classes and are not able to form the social bonds so often forged between students who both live and work together. Commuting students are not physically present on campus as often as typical undergraduate students enrolled at four-year colleges or universities.

In 2013 the AACC stated that the average age of the Community College student is 28 and that, of the nearly 8 million Community College students enrolled in Fall 2011, 59% were only enrolled part time.¹⁴ According to AACC data from 2009 nearly 80% of part time community college students are also currently employed while enrolled.¹⁵ This implies that the Community College student is often engaged in many activities beyond their academic life and alludes to the idea that they may not have the time to pursue recreational entertainment like gaming, movies, or reading. Research demonstrates that such activities can lead to stronger academic success.¹⁶

Yale University describes Sterling Memorial Library as being “the heart of the campus”¹⁷ and, with nearly 4,000,000 volumes, this statement is both literal and figurative. The Cuyahoga Community College Library includes four libraries, one on each of our campus locations. Our combined holdings, spread across four campus libraries, of 126,400 volumes features only 422 popular titles published within the last five years. Our incoming students, regardless of their intentions, cannot be as inspired as someone walking into Case Western Reserve University’s Kelvin Smith Library. Our library does not have popular titles, video games,¹⁸ foreign language movies,¹⁹ or children’s material²⁰ (although our students often bring their children).

Given these realities Cuyahoga Community College began (in 2009) to pursue a variety of collaborations with our neighboring public library systems. Student engagement is one of our primary concerns and it was evident from our collection that we were

not likely to inspire students in the same manner as a “normal” academic library might. In cities like Seattle, Atlanta, Detroit, and Pittsburgh the usage of public libraries grew during the period 2005-2011²¹ while funding (followed by usage) tapered off in Charlotte, North Carolina.²² Public Library usage climbed during this period of economic recession and yet many systems across the country were asked to do more while being presented with actual or looming budget reductions. We believe that both Public and Community College libraries can demonstrate value and increase academic success (as defined by student retention and graduation rates) while improving services and collections through simple partnerships. Our first formal partnership, between Cleveland Public Library (CPL) and our Metropolitan Campus, began the transition from idea to reality in 2009. By 2008 CPL had already established several satellite library collections in neighboring academic libraries (Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland State). The goal was to replicate these installations at the smallest possible cost to Cuyahoga Community College.

The concept of blending a Community College library with a public library can feature many different forms. Excellent examples include Lorain County Community College / Elyria Public Library,²³ Front Range Community College’s Westminster Campus, and the Seminole Community Library at St. Petersburg College in Florida. These examples all involved the creation of a new facility and included a mixture or even merging of staff.

The need to make a Community College library more interesting and useful often leads many professionals to explore grant funded options to add new technologies, to supplement collections,²⁴ or to hire additional staff.²⁵ This method of expansion is the most labor intensive and allows for growth in very controlled and specific ways. Grant funded projects are optimal for those librarians or libraries that elect to retain direct control over their environs. In our scenario, and with the full respect of the skills required of public librarianship, we elected to pursue a partnership with a public library rather than to attempt to fund and maintain our own public library styled collection. The daily operations of an academic library present a significant obstacle to any academic librarian who decides that they are also going to create and manage a public popular collection. Students are always members of the general community at large, whether

or not they are from or intend to remain in the neighborhood after concluding their academic work. Public libraries are always trying to expand their mission by displaying their value to their citizens.²⁶ There are vast differences between collecting popular titles for a geographically based audience (like a public librarian would) and buying monographs and databases to support a specific academic program or department. Because of these realities the Cuyahoga Community College’s Metropolitan Campus decided to invite the Cleveland Public Library to install and maintain a satellite collection in our campus library. The library faculty at the Cuyahoga Community College’s Metropolitan campus do not have experience with collecting material for a contemporary public library collection and because learning that skill and then adding it to existing responsibilities proved extremely impractical the librarians did not elect to pursue any form of grant funding to develop a popular collection. Instead the librarians approached Cleveland Public Library and inquired about their existing installations at CWRU and CSU.

There is certainly a history of popular collections noted in the literature primarily deriving from Janelle Zauha’s “Recreational Reading in Academic Browsing Rooms.”²⁷ In the 1920’s and 1930’s Academic libraries commonly collected and promoted the use of popular titles. The 1940’s saw academic libraries transition into curriculum driven collection planning²⁸ and by the 1950’s there was an evident atmosphere of elitism in the academic library whereby librarians began recommending only titles that they considered worthy of being called “literature”. Elliot notes that “budget, staff time, and space”²⁹ also led to this decrease in advocacy for recreational reading. Research indicates that academic libraries are still reluctant to collect popular titles because, “the titles are not applicable to the curriculum the library is supporting, budget constraints, space constraints, and that the interest and value of these titles are not usually long-lasting enough to warrant purchasing.”³⁰

Many academic libraries maintain popular collections to facilitate the research of culture and trends in society though this is not the reason why a Community College might be interested in such a collection. Pauline Dewan’s article, “*Why Your Academic Library Needs a Popular Reading Collection Now More Than Ever*,” states “a number of studies have demonstrated a relationship between reading, cognitive development,

verbal skills, and academic achievement³¹ and recreational reading as the former helps to develop the cognitive development of verbal skills. Dewan's finds that popular reading collections contribute toward the following benefits:³²

- By responding to student requests for popular reading material the library will be viewed as a user-centered organization.
- The library will attract patrons by providing interesting books and a comfortable, welcoming area where they can read and relax.
- The library will increase its outreach efforts to attract novice users and non-library patrons.
- The library will foster literacy at a time when it is declining.
- The library will promote critical thinking and communication skills in its students.
- The library will help stem the declining interest in reading.
- The library will promote critical thinking and communication skills in its students.
- The library will become an advocate for reading and will foster a lifelong interest in it.
- The library will encourage an activity that will increase students' capacity for concentration and contemplation.
- The library will promote a pursuit that will stimulate the mind, the spirit, and the imagination of your patrons.

Cuyahoga Community College has, in the past, attempted to maintain a popular collection by leasing titles. Usage indicates that this was a welcome facet of our library though, faced with an ever diminished budget, until forced to abandon the project in order to maintain the required academic material. At that point it was decided to maintain a smaller popular collection that corresponded with the existing curriculum. These titles, however, rarely matched with student leisure reading preferences. Finally, the librarians attempted to organize a revolving collection of popular titles via a formal exchange system that was driven by donations. This effort, poorly publicized and labor intensive, was also abandoned in favor of our current collaborations with public library systems.

As previously noted, Cleveland Public Library maintained, at the time of our inquiry, satellite installations at Case Western Reserve's Kelvin Smith Library and at Cleveland State University's Michael Schwartz Library. Our request to discuss a similar

partnership met with sincere enthusiasm, as our students, unlike many attending CWRU or CSU, are also full time permanent residents of Cleveland, Ohio and, therefore, represented an ideal target audience for the CPL system. CPL recognized that an installation at the Metropolitan campus would be widely appreciated by our shared community. John Skrtic, Director of Public Services at Cleveland Public Library noted that Cuyahoga Community College consistently worked toward goals and objectives shared by CPL:

When examining the partnership between Tri-C and CPL we can clearly see that your College and our library attempt to assist our public in many of the same ways. CPL is dedicated to working with community partners to enrich the lives of our citizens. Tri-C has a proven track record of working toward these same goals. CPL is proud to be working alongside your organization and hopes that we can combine our vast resources to help your students and our patrons.³³

The process of setting up the agreement was fairly straightforward. Mr. John Skrtic, Cleveland Public Library's Director of Public Services, and Ms. Sarah Flynn, CPL's Popular Collection Manager, met with the librarians at Metropolitan campus to discuss content for the collection and the available space for the collection was reviewed to determine the overall number of items that could be delivered. Because CPL retains ownership of the materials they also provided the Metropolitan Campus with a self-checkout unit and trained the College librarians to use the software for item discharge and to assist patrons with various minor circulation issues. CPL, with some input from the College librarians, maintains the collection (which includes items well beyond our academic collection policy) featuring audio books, urban fiction, biographies, science fiction, cookbooks, magazines, and children's material. A formal agreement between CPL and the College identifies these terms and was reviewed by our legal department.

The project was supported by the Metropolitan campus leadership with a renovation budget of \$5000.00 that allowed the library to refurbish a storage room adjacent to the main stacks of the collection. The location is ideal and is within sight of the reference desk and fairly distant from the quiet study areas. The room was decorated and the books were shelved.

The collection opened in September 2012. The collection created more than just a new space in our library. The Grand Opening created positive press for both organizations and facilitated a better understanding of the library's value to our College leadership. Dr. Schoop, Campus President of the Metropolitan Campus, officially applied for a public library card and Felton Thomas, Director of the Cleveland Public Library, delivered his application to their circulation department. Further, John Skrtic, CPL's Director of Public Services, initiated a dialog regarding resource sharing. CPL wants to ensure that their electronic resources receive as much usage as possible. CPL provides access to dozens of premier electronic research tools applicable to an academic setting. One example of such a resource is Literature Criticism Online, a resource of extraordinary value to those of our students who are eligible for a CPL library card (based on residency for licensing reasons), which can cost over \$20,000.00 annually depending on the size of the collection and users served.

At Western Campus the librarians' relationship with their public library neighbor, Cuyahoga County Public Library, has been mainly referral based. Students were sent there in person if they need an item immediately or taught to access the CCPL collections online through OhioLINK (now SearchOhio) for items needed with less urgency. Interlibrary loan statistics coupled with on site observations made by College librarians indicated that the CCPL system also commonly issued similar referrals to our academic collections. Wendell G. Johnson, the co-editor of *Community & Junior College Libraries*, noted that this pattern of referrals has always been perceived as a compliment. In further agreement with Dr. Johnson, the librarians at Cuyahoga Community College know it has become more imperative that "Today, when finances are particularly strained, we must be willing to share our resources—electronic databases, print sources, and ourselves."³⁴

The Cuyahoga County Public Library System has 28 branches in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio that serve 47 communities with a total population of 616,527.³⁵ CCPL is a highly rated library system made evident by its recent ranking in the 2012 Library Journal Index of Public Library Service. CCPL scored highest in three of the four per capita measures: circulation, visits, and program attendance among peer libraries with annual operating expenditures of

\$30,000,000+ dollars.³⁶ CCPL's 35.9 per capita circulation was twice that of its nearest competitor.

CCPL's patron-focused collection development combined with a budget of \$3.9 million³⁷ for print is what drives this success and what makes them an ideal partner for our Eastern and Western Campus libraries. CCPL uses centralized selectors who not only work in the office but also serve at the many branches when necessary. Wendy Bartlett, the CCPL Collection Development coordinator, explains that their "buying for demand" focus takes advantage of several quantitative and qualitative measures notably, "The most valuable collection management RA (Readers' Advisory) tools on the face of the earth are my customers' reactions and word of mouth, followed by my staff. Then we rely heavily on prepub reviews... Our print versions are available for holds up to a year ahead of time."³⁸

By allowing patrons to place holds up to one year before the book is published and then maintaining a two patrons to a book holds ratio increases the number of copies bought per title. This metric is especially true and useful for purchasing best sellers. Bartlett also clearly states that CCPL buys genre and midlist titles as well but that only the "good" titles recommended by her RA team or customers.³⁹ Once the peak demand for these titles is done the surplus copies are available to be repurposed without impacting CCPL's service to its registered patrons.

The current collaborative effort began while Michael Collura, the Learning Commons Director for Cuyahoga Community College, attended an unrelated meeting with CCPL Sari Feldman Public Library Director and Hallie Rich, Marketing and Communications Director. Mr. Collura advised his colleagues that the College librarians were interested in collaborating with CCPL on a popular Library Collection. Immediately enthused, the CCPL staff provided names and contact information to get the project started. Staff from both organizations met on Feb. 4, 2013.

CCPL has a similar agreement with Baldwin Wallace University in Berea, Ohio and therefore they already had their portion of the process established. The College librarians were pleasantly surprised with the ease of working with CCPL's experienced staff. One of the primary goals for the College was getting access to a popular reading collection, and the other was permission to use CCPL's name in joint connection with Cuyahoga Community College. By co-branding the

effort, the librarians sought to ensure that students as well as the general public will recognize the extraordinary value of both tax-funded institutions.

The collection shall remain the property of CCPL. Featured items include popular titles (including fiction, teen, and Popular Non-Fiction) that are between 6-8 months old (based on CCPL's original date of acquisition). CCPL declined to provide children's material or popular DVD titles at this time as demand for said items is extremely high and such items tend to experience constant circulation until such a time as they are too damaged to be useful.

CCPL and Cuyahoga Community College's Western Campus have, by mutual agreement, outlined the specifics of circulation of materials, space planning, material shipment, and marketing of the collection.

The University of British Columbia undertook research to determine what form a popular reading collection should take to best serve an academic library. Bestseller fiction and non-fiction, award winners, biographies, classics, short stories, mystery, and science fiction genres⁴⁰ were the top suggestions. CCPL readily agreed to give us bestseller selections from these genres. Though the titles will have been available 6 months we believe that will still benefit our library. Students, especially those who may not be avid readers, have likely already heard about the titles and be more willing to check them out. To reduce wait time there will be multiple copies of most of the titles that CCPL provides.

One other major concern in obtaining a collection from another library is deciding who is responsible for its collection development. A library cannot have a static popular collection for any length of time. For this reason we have, in agreement with CCPL, that their experienced collection management team within CCPL will use their expertise to select the exact titles to put in the collection is an added benefit to the college. College librarians will provide feedback on what types of items receive the most circulation. A predetermined schedule for the replacement of materials is designed to keep the collection fresh and appealing. This plan works in the interest of CCPL because the items will be "checked out" to Cuyahoga Community College increasing their overall count by 200 every 6 weeks.

The UCB study also indicates that the popular collection needs to be in a central location that can be easily "browsed both physically and online."⁴¹ To ful-

fill the online requirement all of the CCPL items will be added, via copy cataloging, to the College library catalog. This will allow students to search for specific items by title or author. We will also add a featured list of the CCPL collection to the homepage of the College's library catalog. Most titles will also include an image of the cover provided by Content Café. When the patron clicks on the cover image more information such as a summary of the book may be available.

Creating space so the physical collection could be browsed was the largest obstacle in getting this project underway. We identified a desirable area for the collection. It was in the front corner of the library. The entire area where the collection will be housed is bordered by windows and will allow visibility from outside the library. Comfortable seating near the collection is also available.

All library resources require proper marketing before their full usefulness may be measured. The CPL @ Metro Collection is promoted with visible signage and whenever the College Librarians deliver information literacy instruction they promote the collection with printed bookmarks highlighting the resource. Strategies to publicize our "new" popular collection to our faculty, students, and staff are being developed and include making announcements in the College Newspaper, online, via email, and within faculty governance organizations. One strategy already in place is the brand recognition we gain by being able to use the CCPL or CPL logo on promotional material and on our website.

A major part of our marketing effort will center on our students taking specific classes in developmental education or English as a Second Language. Excellent marketing examples designed to promote recreational reading within an academic library include any of the One Book, One Campus⁴² programs offered at academic libraries across the country.

In order to assess the value of the popular collection we need to conduct ongoing reviews of metrics like circulation, visitor counts, public library card applications, and reference or directional question data. Data regarding genre circulation can be culled from our library catalog and can be applied toward future collection decisions as well.

In conclusion we believe that student success can be aided by the presence of a more diverse and interesting library collection. The financial limits placed upon an academic library, particularly within

the Community College, prevent many existing collections from being able to fully engage and inspire students. Because Public Libraries normally seek to expand their usage, thereby justifying their expenditure, the low cost models for collaboration described above create a mutually beneficial scenario for all involved stakeholders. Academic librarians can focus on the specific concerns of their profession, information literacy, collection management, and instruction, while allowing Public Libraries to exercise their expertise in building popular collections tailored to the specific recreational reading needs of a given campus population. In the above examples both the Cleveland Public Library and Cuyahoga County Public Library systems were able to extend circulating popular collections without incurring significant expense because their collection policies already allow for the purchase of multiple copies of bestselling titles. The academic library hosts incurred only optional, one time, remodeling expenses while preparing a site for the collection. In these examples both systems build upon their existing value in a highly cost effective and simple way.

It is our professional opinion that our further research will display a link between these expanded non-academic collections and an increase in student retention as well as graduation rates at the host institutions.

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