

Final Exam

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1. *In what ways do academic libraries provide a public service or work towards social improvement?*

I believe libraries innately work towards social improvement. Professions such as social workers and mental health professionals often work on directly addressing social improvement at many levels, from individuals to state-wide policies. However, libraries have been a bastion for the economically disadvantaged, disabled, or downtrodden individuals in society. The American Library Association has been very clear that libraries are meant to be open to all individuals, regardless of any of their personal characteristics. One overarching, global goal of libraries is to teach information literacy to individuals that enable them to find answers on their own. Libraries are also focused on providing access to information without judgment or restrictions. Knowledge is power and libraries are focused on providing knowledge to all individuals.

While academic libraries are not often utilized by community members and non-academic folks, they do provide education and access to a wide range of information. Academic libraries are also part of an institution that provides further education to individuals. Academic libraries do offer their resources to community members, though many are not aware this is an option available to them.

Academic libraries also support researchers. Very often, researchers are focused on improving quality of life or services to underserved populations. In supporting these

researchers, academic libraries are contributing to society. In addition, many academic libraries preserve general and special collections. They preserve records, journals, books, articles, and other unique materials. Academic libraries help assure scholars, students, and community members access to accurate, intact records of the past.

Academic libraries also have opportunities to contribute to the college's policies and participate in campus-wide events. These might include celebrations of diversity, art, or specific periods of history. All of these things can contribute to individual and societal improvement.

2. *What are some benefits and draw backs of a more collegial structure in academic libraries, with librarians being treated more similarly to faculty?*

In some college settings, it seems like libraries are treated more like a department. Some pieces of this include expectations that staff will serve on academic committees, be involved with board meetings, act as liaisons to faculty members, perform peer reviews, produce work that can be published, participate in group decision making, and interact with other staff as fellow colleagues. Depending on the given college, the library may be run by a chair person or a library director. Some of the advantages can be greater independence, greater influence, better representation at board and committee meetings, increased negotiating power, more inclusion in discussions regarding salaries, benefits, and funding, and potential for tenure.

While there are advantages, there are also disadvantages. While tenure can be an excellent opportunity, if librarians are expected to publish they will need time,

administrative support, and potentially research participants. If librarians are expected to be researchers performing and publishing original research, they will need support and guidance from experienced researchers and statisticians. Being a board or committee member can take up valuable time, as can a more democratic style of management. If not properly curbed, meetings can take over and no actual work will get done. There is also the possibility that if librarians are counted as faculty, policies put in place with faculty in mind could seriously hinder librarians. There is also the potential for the library to become a more active participant in campus politics if functioning more like a department. It seems that libraries are often viewed by college administrators as a neutral party with few motives beyond ascertaining their funding to purchase their materials and pay their staff. This perspective could change if librarians began branching out and being more involved in daily campus matters.

3. How could librarians and faculty members better encourage students to increase their information literacy?

While academic librarians have a vast array of skills they can offer to students, most students are not aware of these skills. Students are more likely to ask their friends, parents, or professors for guidance in their research process than a librarian. There is also an inaccurate assumption often made by faculty and librarians alike that students have learned foundational information literacy in high school.

One thing libraries can do is to provide an accurate assessment of the student body to show where the average student falls in relation to information literacy. This would be an

excellent research project for academic librarians interested in publishing. It would also be helpful to determine a baseline; after a few years of innovation and intervention, students could be assessed in the same way a second time. Potentially, the library could show that the efforts of the library and faculty have paid off and there are statistically significant differences between the baseline and the follow-up.

Once the library has an idea of what the average student knows, they could meet with different departments and facilitate discussions regarding information literacy. If possible, each department liaison should have some degree of expertise in the department's field of study. The liaison could remind the faculty that if librarians provide information literacy training to their students, the students would be more likely to utilize the library's resources and be less likely to seek research assistance from faculty. It could also help the students become better researchers and the term papers faculty receive may be more interesting and potentially of better quality. For faculty to readily accept the library's offer, it may be helpful to remind them of the benefits they themselves will reap. Once relationships are built with faculty, librarians will have individual contacts within departments that may be willing to advocate more strongly for the library's involvement surrounding information literacy.

Here is an interesting idea for a research project: survey the incoming freshman class on a set of questions or basic research tasks that reflect their information literacy levels, initiate an intervention that focuses on increasing information literacy in that cohort, and then survey the same set of students a few years later when they're juniors or seniors. It would be a significant piece of longitudinal research but academic libraries could potentially

create evidence-based best practices. It would require a substantial amount of funding but an academic library could apply for grant funding to complete such a project.

Beyond direct student contact, the library can also make sure their website is easy to access, interactively provides guidance and live online assistance, as well as an automated online training focused on library research and information literacy. The library should have a strong digital presence to reach the maximum number of students. Students in the current generation are more likely to turn to the internet and Google for answers rather than the local academic library. The library needs to make it very easy to find their site and online resources. Students may discount the library as a relic of the past if the website is not accurate or easy to maneuver.