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Optimizing Library Services: Location, Location, Location

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what I paid for the six-cylinder Camry that was sitting in my driveway.

I tried to make sense of the fact that a preponderance of the sets came from a single publisher. A friend, who is not in publishing, theorized that this publisher submitted so many sets in an effort to make as many editors and contributors as possible happy. I didn't buy that explanation. Maybe it was just a case of burying any competitors under a truckload of books.

When I cut open the cartons one afternoon, what struck me, beyond the sheer massiveness of all the sets of reference works in my garage, was that in publishing terms, the sets were all of very high quality. The bindings, boards and paper were all meant for continual usage. There was liberal use of color wherever it made sense. Margins and fonts struck me as generous and in the service of readers, not cramped and stunted to cut down on page counts in dedication to the demands of the bottom line. In short, the publishers of these sets did not scrimp on anything, which is a great selling point when a publisher is trying to attract high achievers with sterling reputations as editors for projects

like these. And the more eminent the editor, the easier it is to get contributors, a task that is becoming increasingly difficult, given the added burdens that are heaped on academics and industry practitioners nowadays.

In this Internet age, it's remarkable to me that publishers engage willingly in what some derisively might call "dead-tree" information dissemination. And even more remarkably, that they invest so much money and effort. Form, it seems to me, exceeds function in the case of the print versions of these massive sets.

It became obvious as I went through the volumes in the cartons that each set tackled an important subject comprehensively. So in judging terms, when I considered the comprehensiveness in tandem with the high production quality, it was hard initially for me find criteria on which I could rank the sets. But not for long. Maybe it was the cold in my unheated garage this past December that helped me reach conclusions expeditiously about the winner and honorable mentions.

The other books I got to judge this fall had, for the most part, the same attributes in terms of production values as the scientific reference sets. Some of them could be called beautiful. This lavishness used to be mainly the province of subsidized books from university presses, but even commercial publishers go all-in on

many books nowadays. Is this willingness on the part of commercial houses to spend money on books, which in some circles are so last-century, or even the one before that, compensation for the financial bounty produced by STM journal publishing, which makes so many people so angry? Don't ask. I'm pretty sure that no one in a position of authority at any STM publisher will give you a straight-faced answer. But I do have my theories, among them a perceived demand felt by publishers that they need to find ways to give back to the STM community some portion of that bounty. It can't all go to the shareholders or into executive salaries without some customer payback. (More about that at some future time.)

I get to keep whatever books strike my fancy, whether or not, **Arlene** sighs, I have room for them on the bookshelves that populate three rooms in our home. Most of the rest I give over to a local college bookstore for charitable distribution. As for all those reference sets in the garage, a local book dealer came by in a late-model station wagon and hauled them away. He took the sets on consignment. If he sells any of them, I'll probably give my half of the money to some pet worthy causes. As for any sets that he doesn't sell, I told him to give them away and under no circumstances return them to me. I don't want to risk a disc problem in my lower back. 🌳

Optimizing Library Services — Location, Location, Location ... Libraries Offer Prime Community Spaces

by **Dr. Abigail G. Scheg** (Elizabeth City State University) <agscheg@ecs.edu>

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In Fall 2014, I, along with **Shelley Rodrigo**, and **Mary Beth Pennington** from **Old Dominion University**, hosted a community writing workshop on campus at **Elizabeth City State University (ECSU)**. Originally, our idea was to have an open concept time and space for individuals from different institutions, and just around the community, to come together for a specified period of time solely to work on writing projects. This would not be a formal gathering, or an organized workshop or discussion. Instead, it would be what all individuals with a writing project need: time, space, quiet, and support. In our original promotion shared with faculty, staff, and students at different institutions, as well as community members, I stated that I would be available to talk about writing projects with anyone that wanted a sounding board. However, most of the time would be spent quietly, and individually, tackling our writing projects.

Since we wanted this idea to be so broad and inviting, we thought that it would be best suited for a community space — something not affiliated with one of our institutions. But, as

a new venture, we had little time, uncertainty of interest, and zero budget. We discussed community gathering spaces that we could plead with to waive a rental fee. We discussed just taking over a coffee shop or a Panera, but decided against it since we didn't know how many people we would have. We discussed a community library space, but found that became too problematic due to their limited hours on a weekend. Finally, we decided that **ECSU's** campus provided a good venue, and a central location for the invitations sent to individuals and institutions in southeastern Virginia and eastern North Carolina. Although I would have had access and approval to use my campus classroom and office building to hold this workshop, it lacked a central space that was sufficient for this purpose: close enough that individuals could find one another and talk if need be, but not a small enough space so that we are all sitting together at a table to work on our projects. Instead, we decided that **ECSU's G.R. Little Library** would provide a good space for this purpose, and give writers access to library materials should they want to utilize

any of them in the time that they were there.

The library space turned out to be an incredibly productive location for the writers who attended this workshop. The workshop was scheduled for a Saturday, and just a few weeks before the workshop, **ECSU** announced that the library would be closed on the weekends because of budget cuts. The workshop was still held, but because it was otherwise closed, it was a quiet and focused area for writers. Some writers chose tucked away nook-like desks to record their ideas. Others used the couches, and lounged as they wrote and reflected. Others, myself included, staked out a large table where I could spread out all of the items in my traveling work kit: notes, resources, laptop, coffee, and water bottle. We were close enough that someone could find me if they had a question about the space or the resources, but separate enough that we were all able to identify a place where we felt the most comfortable and productive. And the possibilities of libraries as tremendous assets for community space came to light.

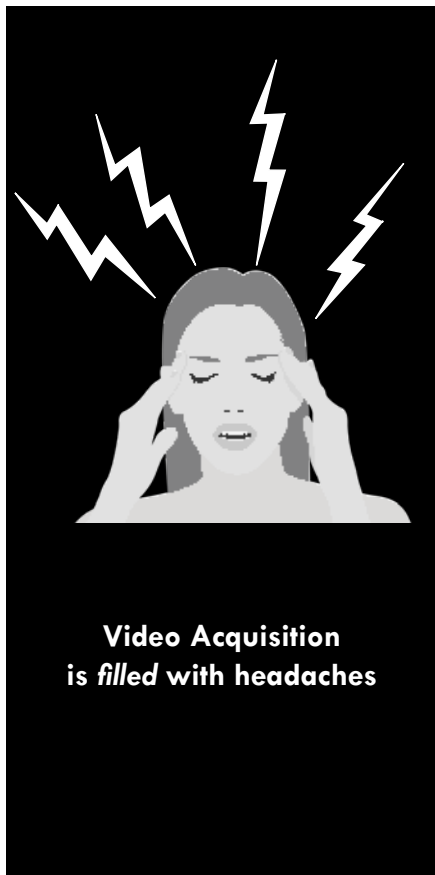
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Library Space: Something We Take for Granted Until We Need the Quiet

As a composition instructor, I require my students to not only conduct online research, but also to visit the library as well. Many of my students don't know where the library is on campus, they don't know how to find a book or a journal online, and they certainly don't know how to follow the call number to get to the book on the shelf. Although in some ways the processes of research, publication, and library resources are changing, they are of fundamental importance to all students and community members, even if these individuals do not realize the great potential and opportunities. Libraries are undoubtedly changing. Some resources and publications are entirely online, causing shelving to be emptied or eliminated. Card catalogs are now coveted design materials on HGTV, and not what holds the organizational secrets of library materials. Libraries are not limited by the physical space of the building, but now offer hundreds and thousands of resources that we can access from our classrooms, offices, bedrooms, dorm rooms, and hotel rooms. The space, though. What of the tremendous buildings that stand on our campuses and hold the secrets and knowledge?

The space is one of the reasons that I have my students go to the library. I hear about college roommate horror stories, residence hall "study room" fails, and stories of students harmlessly walking across only to be kidnapped by their friends and taken to fast food restaurants. Recreational spaces on a college campus are not always designed to be the most conducive study spaces, but campus libraries often have comfortable and quiet study spaces with room to spare. For students who struggle with a place to go, or a quiet change of pace, the library could be their refuge, as it was for the writers during our workshop. I also think that the space is one of the tremendous offerings that libraries have for 21st-century faculty members. As educational allies, sharing spaces can be one of the smallest steps leading to one of the greatest accomplishments.

I strive to maintain open lines of communication between library staff, and our department at least. I also serve as the Library Liaison for our department, letting other faculty members know of events, budgets, journals, and databases that may need to be reviewed, and much more. Academic libraries in general have done a tremendous job of opening themselves up to communication. At ECSU alone, students (or faculty or staff), can communicate to library staff members through telephone, text message, email, or Twitter, as well as just stopping by the building. Offering so many modes of communication has made libraries, and the research process, much more accessible and manageable for tech-savvy students. When I discuss the library as part of my composition class, I tell my students that there are many ways to contact library staff members in case they don't have time to go to the library, or are just nervous to go to a new place on campus by themselves. Many students scoff when I make the latter remark, but I have also had several that follow up and say thank you for letting them know that there are so many ways to get in touch with someone.



**Video Acquisition
is filled with headaches**

Making the Best of an Educational Space

When I was invited to write this guest column for *Against the Grain*, I was given the topic of "What services academic libraries should offer in the 21st century," coming from the perspective of an academic faculty member. One of the first things that came to mind was increasing online resources and ensuring that distance students have equal access to library materials as their face-to-face counterparts. But I almost felt like that response was the easy way out. A focus on open access materials and digitization is here to stay, and undoubtedly the topic of many, many conversations spanning library staff member conversations, as well as faculty members' conversations. I thought further into it, and the uniqueness of the library space really resonated with me. Academic libraries are a place on campus unlike any other. While they are social places, they are also educational spaces, and individual spaces. What other place on campus serves in these, somewhat conflicting, roles constantly, as our library spaces do? I find it truly fascinating to think about, but then again, I'm a sucker for a good library nook.



The possibilities of library spaces are endless, and I have a challenge for both academic libraries and faculty members: How can you help to make the library the best educational space for students?

Here's the remedy



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Faculty members: How can you help ensure that the library stays current with the unique needs of your academic discipline? Engage in conversation with library staff members; take your classes on a field trip for a day to the library, or a room in the library. Libraries have information for everyone, materials for all disciplines, so how can you help to make it connect and resonate with your students? It's not just about the materials, print or digital; it's not just about the resources that they have or those that they don't have. It's about preserving this unique educational environment where we've all put in so much time, and so many hours as researchers, scholars, and as students ourselves.

*Dr. Abigail G. Scheg is an Assistant Professor of English at Elizabeth City State University in the department of Language, Literature, and Communication (LLC). She researches and publishes in the areas of online pedagogy, social media, first-year composition, and popular culture. Her publications can be found in numerous venues including journals, edited collections, blogs, and Webinars. On the off chance she is not working, Dr. Scheg can be found enjoying time with her husband, family, and friends, or traveling. She is the author and editor of several IGI Global titles, most recently **Implementation and Critical Assessment of the Flipped Classroom Experience.***