

2015

You Can “Like” It on Paper Too: Reaching Digital Students through Analog Displays

Rachael Muszkiewicz

Valparaiso University, Rachael.Muszkiewicz@valpo.edu

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Recommended Citation

Muszkiewicz, R (2015). You can “like” it on paper too: reaching digital students through analog displays. In S. Bonnand & M.A. Hansen (Eds.), *Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries* (127-155). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

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Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries

Sheila Bonnard
Montana State University, USA

Mary Anne Hansen
Montana State University, USA

A volume in the Advances in Library and Information Science (ALIS) Book Series



An Imprint of IGI Global

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Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA, USA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Innovative solutions for building community in academic libraries / Sheila Bonnand and Mary Anne Hansen, editors.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4666-8392-1 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-4666-8393-8 (ebook) 1. Academic libraries--Management. 2. Community development. I. Bonnand, Sheila, editor. II. Hansen, Mary Anne, 1961- editor.

Z675.U5I576 2015

025.1'977--dc23

2015008169

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Library and Information Science (ALIS) (ISSN: 2326-4136; eISSN: 2326-4144)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.

Chapter 8

You Can “Like” It on Paper Too: Reaching Digital Students through Analog Displays

Rachael Muszkiewicz
Valparaiso University, USA

ABSTRACT

In response to literature on libraries as space and the Millennial generation, this chapter speaks to the importance of the academic library as both social and communal space and how to communicate with today's college students. These case studies illustrate that students can be reached through analog displays, building an unconscious community between students as a group and students with the library. Community built within the academic library is discussed in light of these analog displays, the current library literature and via sociological positions. It is concluded that although it is thought that students want digital or online communication only, the highest amount of interaction with displays come from the traditional, analog elements.

INTRODUCTION

Research and information are increasingly being discovered online. Many students may never enter the library building, yet still use databases and other parts of the online library. However, students continue to use physical academic libraries as they did when the building was still the revered heart of the campus, to study. Nevertheless, questions remain: how can the library reach out to these young students, who grew up entrenched in technology and how can librarians reach them on a personal and physical level if the literature and popular culture suggest that they only want to communicate digitally, in an online format? One answer lies in the library display. While displays are mostly seen in the realm of public or school libraries, they can be equally important to academic libraries. What is more familiar in academic library displays is the presenting of the library's collections, rare books, and other materials that showcase what the library has to offer. Rarely are displays purely lighthearted or playful, produced for the express reason of stress relief and entertainment within the library. Displays come in various shapes and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8392-1.ch008

sizes and can take place in the physical realm as well as the digital world. College students, especially Millennial students, respond surprisingly well to physical displays that use analog types of interaction.

When Valparaiso University’s Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources (CCLIR) produces displays with interactive analog elements, and in this case analog is defined as not digital or computer-centric, each has proven more popular than their digital counterparts. Students appear to respond with more enthusiasm to the analog components. Analog displays garner a personal connection with student patrons, and show students that the library wants to interact with them. Even on a basic level displays can build community. Analog displays demonstrate student engagement with the physical space of the library and contribute to the academic library being a value added space on campus. Student engagement also leads to a feeling of goodwill between students and the library. This level of communication between the library and the student body can only be experienced if a student steps into the building. This chapter will review the literature regarding displays in libraries. It will detail the current student body, Millennials, and determine what they want and expect within the physical library building. In-person, analog displays will be compared and contrasted with online, digital displays. The chapter will detail display processes and case studies of displays produced at the CCLIR, and then discuss them within the contexts of libraries, sociology and community.

BACKGROUND

The Study of Space

Grayton (2008) defined both social and communal activity within library space: “Communal activity in academic libraries is a solitary activity: it is studious, contemplative, and quiet. Social activity is a group activity: it is sometimes studious, not always contemplative, and certainly not quiet” (p. 60). Social activity is seen in specific spaces and functions. The ubiquitous coffee shop, group study rooms and common spaces clearly invite a different type of behavior than what would be seen in a traditional library. This is what the literature says the Millennial Generation requires, and many libraries have responded. Communal activity, consisting of quiet study and contemplation amongst an environment conducive to such, is a conditioned desire. Many academic libraries, influenced by information commons trends, have renovated or created facilities to focus on this social space. Traditional study carrels were traded for long multi-seat tables and individual study rooms were adjusted to accommodate larger groups. These changes were an assumed necessity, but there is little evidence that these changes enhance the library itself or the students’ usage of it (Yoo-Lee, Lee & Velez, 2013).

The Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources (CCLIR) opened in 2004 on the Indiana campus of Valparaiso University. It replaced the old Moellering Library and every measure was taken by library services’ faculty and staff to make it the most student-centric building possible. Both student views and the most current research were taken into consideration, shaping design elements such as the amount of natural light, and the number of study rooms. A decade ago, the literature recommended information commons, and scholars discussed changes in the physical space through design and planning; the accommodation of changing technology was key (MacWhinnie, 2003). Thus, the CCLIR has many of those aspects in its design, such as a coffee shop and other social areas as well as group study rooms. Much thought also went into different aspects of noise level within the building; currently the third and fourth floors are the quiet floors while the first and second remain noisier and more social.

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Fortunately, the building was intended to evolve with the changing trends of students and how they use the building. The CCLIR’s ability to change and adapt has not gone unnoticed, and the gate counts over the past decade have remained consistently high. These design decisions made by library faculty were prophetic, as the literature now suggests that the best academic libraries are the ones that can straddle the line between social and communal space.

An explanation for this dichotomous use of the building comes from sociology. Foucault (1998) posited that people’s lives were ruled by a series of oppositions. “These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public place, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work” (p. 238). Oldenburg (1989) fills in these between places with the term third place: a place that was neither work nor home but was equally as necessary. Third places include spaces like coffee shops and pubs, and are places where community can grow. In the academic realm, the library is a space that fits into those between places, a third place for students to get into the mindset for study. The library science literature echoes this, with the debate over social and communal space, and the knowledge that students may enter the building for the academic ambiance, which is more conducive to studying (Demas & Scherer, 2002). But who are the students who use the library space, and how does the library communicate with them?

Millennials as Primary Constituency

The years that encompass the Millennial Generation are varied, as are the names for the generation itself: born somewhere between 1980 to 1994, 1985 to 2000, Generation Y, the Net Generation; there is no standard time or name. What is known is that this generation is the current majority of undergraduates in higher education and has been for a number of years. There are scores of articles, books and reports written about how to reach these students, both in libraries and beyond. As Singham (2009) points out, every new generation named is categorized by common traits, which may devolve into stereotypes.

According to much of the literature about Millennials, these students’ brains are profoundly different than those who would be teaching them. These students have shorter attention spans from playing video games and being online and they grew up surrounded by technology and are therefore adept at using it; they demand immediate access to everything and that information had to be entertaining (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). These students are fully immersed in social media, everything they want to interact with is digital, and prefer to work as a group rather than as individuals (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011). Millennials need to be mobile and to be in constant communication in a digital social community. According to the Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends report on Millennials from 2010, Millennials (ages 18 to 29) are more likely to use the internet and cell phones, use social media and frequent social media sites much more than previous generations, and connect to the internet wirelessly through mobile devices. The updated report from 2014 confirms that social media use is high, with 81% of Millennials using Facebook (Pew Research Center).

Particular interest has been paid to reaching and communicating with these students in a digital fashion, including the libraries which have adapted to keep up with these changing technology trends. In the past decade the trend has been information about connecting to students in any digital way possible: academic libraries should be using Second Life, chat reference and social media to reach Millennial students. The majority of works were on social media; this arena seems to be where libraries targeted their communications to students. Of all social media outlets, Facebook is the most cited in the literature and many articles focus on how to increase the number of students a library can reach. Marketing literature

even suggests, “Yes, this is the generation that wants to ‘know’ and ‘friend’ companies” (Russell, 2011). While there have been some voices of descent (see Stephens and Booth, who both speak out against “technolust”), the message was clear: Millennials want to interact with and get their information about institutional entities through social media.

As detailed above, trends and literature have instructed that academic libraries should try everything in their power to connect with students virtually; that going to where the students are would create a larger amount of interaction. This does not seem to be the case with what librarians have observed in the CCLIR. An important question to ask is about the return on investment: does the interaction garnered from these virtual outlets equate or outweigh the amount of time, money and effort expended by the library? For example, almost from its inception, academic libraries scrambled to use Second Life, believing it would become the virtual landscape for reference. However, it has been shown that most patrons are only interested in the novelty and the amount of training involved to run this virtual library took too much time away from other tasks (Little, 2011). If patrons are not interested in using something, there is no justification for the time and energy spent. Chat reference is commonplace, with many academic libraries receiving it well; however, virtual interactions at the CCLIR have paled in comparison with the amount of in-person interactions. The most popular way to connect virtually with students remains social media, and specifically the behemoth Facebook.

The CCLIR and Facebook

Until the fall semester of 2013, the library’s Facebook page was piecemeal, with no one individual expected to do all posting nor was it part of anyone’s job description. After the creation of a social media working group consisting of library faculty and staff, funds were secured for a social media student assistant, who dedicated two hours a week to scheduling posts. The group set the goal of daily posting, something which increased the library’s Facebook presence immediately and kept it on a higher level than previously measured. This visibility was welcome but the marketing world shows that the flat, one-way push of information is not working on its own; to truly communicate there has to be engagement, a conversation (Hull, 2011). However, despite these attempts to get students to interact beyond seeing the post, and perhaps liking it, little interaction was occurring. During the weeks between spring break and spring finals 2014, weekly contests were held on Facebook. Once a week, the students would be asked to participate in an activity like, “Do you want to win \$5 in Crusader Cash [meal card money]? Here’s how you can! Just post a picture of you reading in the Christopher Center, here on our page, and you could win!” In the trial period of five weeks, there were only two responses to a single contest. It was clear that the students who could have participated and received a reward had no interest.

Library faculty looked to the literature in an attempt to explain this lack of participation. Jacobson (2011) found that while Facebook was used sufficiently for marketing, it was not a way to communicate with students; the study showed that most Facebook pages of academic libraries did not have any active participation. It also has been shown that students are no longer only using Facebook, but have expanded into other social media platforms. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), 42% of adults online use multiple social network platforms. Undergraduate students are using the academic library and may very well be its virtual fans, but they are not interested in interacting digitally. This presents a problem in how to reach these students and how to draw them into the academic library community.

Displays in the Academic Library

The idea of collecting a group of objects and then presenting them to others is not a new one. From the old fashioned Cabinet of Curiosities to “Show and Tell” in elementary schools, it is a very human trait to want to share something of importance with others. Libraries, especially public libraries, have traditionally produced such exhibitions: showcasing and providing access to the collection. At the academic library level, displays of this caliber may seem middling or frivolous. After all the students should be using the library for study and contemplation. Yet, even in the academic library, one may need to attract patrons. Brown and Power (2006) agree, “Exhibits draw visitors, and librarians see exhibits as adding value to the library experience, both for the visitor and for the librarian” (p.6). Done in a fun and engaging manner, these types of exhibitions can be an enticement for students. At Valparaiso University, the College of Arts and Sciences building is attached to the CCLIR, creating regular foot traffic between the two buildings; an exhibition could stop those students who were only using the library as a conduit. For those students who were already coming into the library to use the physical space, a display could be seen as a gesture of goodwill, a bit of amusement that shows the students that library faculty knows what interests them and wants to communicate.

In the most straightforward terms, the term “displays” describes what is created in libraries, while exhibits remain the domain of the museum. Displays are far more common, as they are less expensive to produce and host, and are often overlooked, both as creative and scholarly output. The literature concerning displays in academic libraries is very sparse; much of the literature focuses on public libraries. What does focus on academic libraries is overwhelmingly “how-to” information for creating displays, combining displays with marketing by showcasing a library’s special collections, or is very simply outdated. Ideas have changed about the focus of displays and new media and materials have changed the way displays are produced and consumed. For example, this chapter will run counter to Caswell’s (1985) idea that education should be the primary goal of all academic library displays. The idea that a display should mainly publicize a library’s physical collection is also still prevalent and still used to great success (Brown, 2013). However, much of the literature does not address interactivity within a display. Most of the literature about interactive displays comes from museum studies and may not apply to libraries.

For CCLIR displays, much thought has been given to the display’s location. The majority of all displays have been located on the library’s second floor, which is considered a louder, social floor; no quiet study is interrupted. This location is also in the center of the library’s main lobby, directly in the path of the busiest doors and near the main circulation desk, making these displays hard to avoid. Also important, as Simon (2010) encourages, displays should work within the mission of the institution, and advance it. The displays at the CCLIR do fit in with the library’s mission and strategic plan, specifically “Goal 4: Christopher Center Library Services (CCLS) will undertake concrete actions to deepen student, faculty, and staff well-being and a sense of appreciation by CCLS” (p. 4). These displays are meant to do exactly that: show that the library does appreciate the students and hopefully increase their feelings of well-being, especially when they visit the library’s physical space.

While there are great benefits of display work, there are also challenges. Producing displays, can take valuable time away from the librarian’s other duties. This is felt particularly at a smaller library, such as the CCLIR, as there may be only one person assuming the responsibility and inclination. At CCLIR, library student assistants have been specifically selected and trained to assist with display work. They

have helped with topic development, production and assembling of these displays. As much as these student assistants have been able to do, their work only accounts for 20-40% of the estimated work load. The librarian who puts on displays must balance display work with other responsibilities. Budgetary allocations may be constrained and displays may not be seen as a financial priority. However, there are ways to produce displays through inventive thinking that would not be a drain on any budget; all three displays described within this chapter cost a total of \$365, not including faculty and staff time. There can be other concerns as well, for example, there is the possibility that certain display subjects are seen as controversial. Banned Books Week displays have this potential, based on the subject matter. Recently, a subject faculty member told a librarian that a student had decided not to attend Valparaiso University due to the annual Darwin Day display in the CCLIR. The threat of controversy should not halt the display process; librarians must not be cowed into not displaying that which may be disputed.

Digital vs. Analog Displays

Higher education faculty and administration are told Millennial students want digital: they want information online, they want classes online, they communicate with their fellow classmates online. Nothing else seems to matter. The majority of this stereotyping, at the very least, does not apply to all Millennial students (Lackie, LeMasney & Pierce, 2009). Following this assumption, all displays should reach students in their preferred medium, digital, and specifically on a social media platform. Contrary to this belief, as previously discussed, most students are not interacting with the academic library on social media. It stands to reason that a communication element designed specifically for this format with the goal of making the students feel like they are an interacting part of a community would fail. If the students cannot muster the effort to like a picture or participate for a reward, they will not heavily interact. Interaction on social media is also limited in scope.

When something is designed for student interaction, and placed on a purely social media platform, an enormous audience is discounted. A Facebook page can reach many people but its reach may only extend to those who have friended or liked it. There is the possibility of those people sharing it further, but that is not something that can be relied upon. This audience can be further limited by Facebook's algorithms which limit what someone may see on their news feed; if they have not changed settings or interacted with the library's postings at all, Facebook may filter it out leaving the library with fans who will never see the postings (Backstrom, 2013). No matter how much a library may market its Facebook page, the onus is on the student to take the first step. Currently the CCLIR's Facebook page has 899 likes, which certainly represents the current student body, but it is important to remember that this number also includes other fans, university staff and faculty and past student body; the "like" does not go away when the student graduates. Even if the 899 fans represented only the current Valparaiso University student body, it would be representative of 20% of students; the university's most current FTE is 4304. The amount of effort necessary to create a digital display would not justify reaching such a limited audience.

Producing a digital display takes a level of expertise that many librarians may not possess. Social media in and of itself also constrains what a librarian can do online with a display; as of now there is no way to place a cohesive display on Facebook or its ilk. One can draw together a collection of images or links to other webpages, but they are intrinsically separate entities, and would not be seen together unless viewed on the library's Facebook wall. Since most users of Facebook primarily only look at their own news feeds, this collection would be lost, broken into disparate sections that may not be seen as a collective whole. There is, of course, the possibility of creating an online, interactive display on another

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platform and then linking it to social media, but this would take an even higher level of skill. Analog display means, however crude they may seem, have many more options and are mostly only limited by the creativity of the display creator. These efforts to reach the students will most likely be appreciated and may be seen as charming in a nostalgic way.

When one thinks of analog displays, one may think of the grade school bulletin board with construction paper letters and bad clip art. Interaction is usually not thought of in this context. The CCLIR displays are created using old-fashioned methods, but they are more sophisticated and have a level of interaction. These are displays that require no special skills to construct, although a level of creativity will help. The audience for these displays is broad and includes anyone who visits the building. Positioned in a prime spot in the middle of the main floor lobby, all the displays are highly visible. These displays have a high level of interaction, and this may be in part to digital influenced details. Ideas and themes can come from anywhere and pop culture websites are some of the best places to get ideas about what interests undergraduate students. Online memes can be easily recreated in a paper format, and having open ended questions that the students can answer anonymously can mimic online message boards. In summation, an analog display can do just as much as a digital one, if not more, with similar elements. They can provide a greater ease in production, are more cost effective, and have more interaction with students.

Display Case Studies

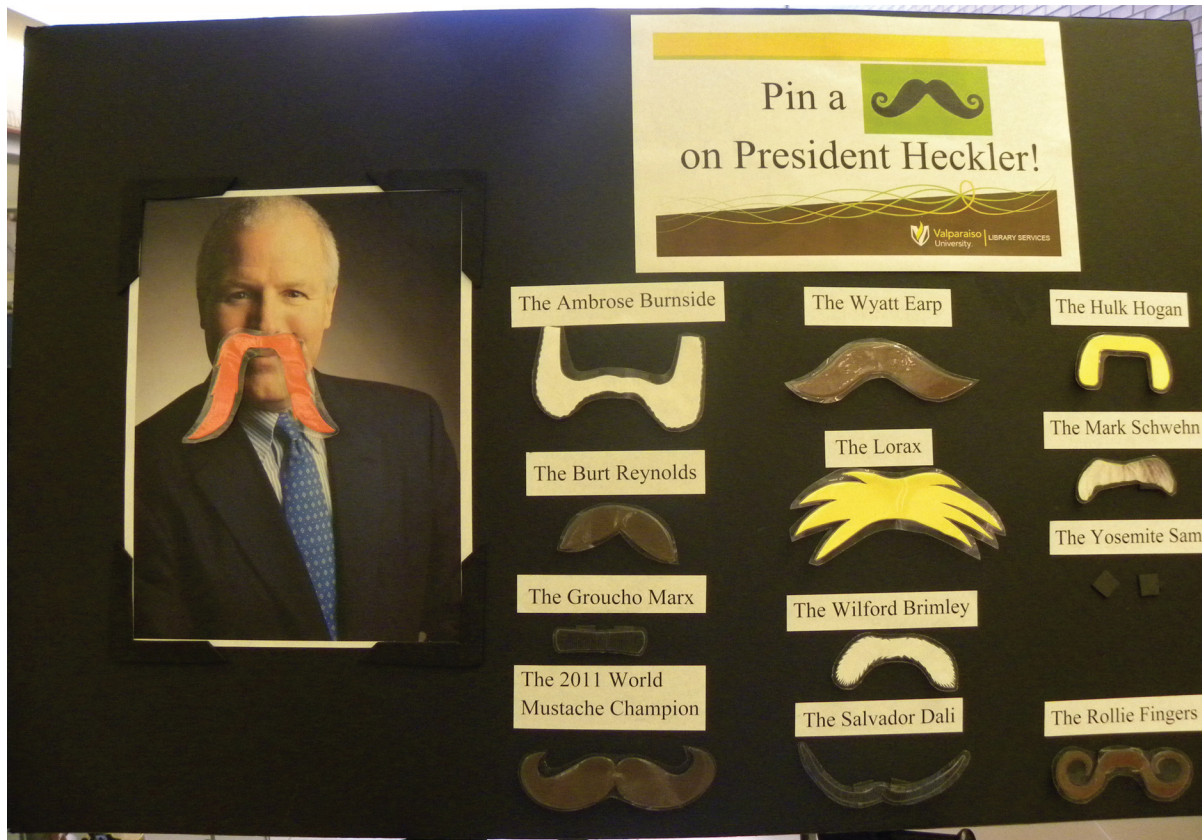
Before the 2010 academic year, the library averaged three to four displays a year, the majority of these being very small in size and containing few interactive elements. For the past four years, the CCLIR averaged twelve displays a year, and the number of these with interactivity has grown every year. In the initial experimentation period (academic years 2011-2013) two displays were produced each year that had interactive elements. The success of the interactive displays led to the creation of five specifically interactive displays during the 2013-2014 academic year. The level of interactivity varied, and there was a conscious decision not to fatigue the students with too much. Several of the displays were attached to a specific date or an annual event and could easily be planned ahead of time; others were born around programs in the building or collaboration with other entities on campus.

The displays in the CCLIR fall into three categories: displays connected to a program or event that the library is hosting or co-sponsoring, displays associated with a specific day or time of year, and those which would provide stress relief to students during finals. According to previously discussed literature, most displays or exhibits put on in academic libraries are done so to provide a learning experience, typically there seems to be an educational basis to the curation. Little has been written about producing humorous displays for student stress relief, especially during semester finals, when most libraries see their peak use. The Mayo Clinic has stated that laughter can be stress relieving, and has both short-term and long-term benefits, such as soothing tension and improving mood (2013). In looking at this type of literature and in the library’s mission of being responsive to student needs, it was decided to make an irreverent spring finals display part of the annual schedule.

The CCLIR Celebrates Mustaches

The first library display for student stress relief was a display about mustaches, a theme trending in popular culture, curated for spring finals week in 2012. The library’s marketing student assistant helped with the design and implementation of this display. There were many facets, including several interac-

Figure 1. Pin a mustache on Valparaiso University President Heckler



tive poster elements. Those who interacted with the displays will be labeled as patrons, as anyone who visited the library could have done so, although the majority of patrons were students. Patrons had the opportunity to: vote for their favorite famous mustache, guess famous Valparaiso University mustaches by the facial hair alone, and place different mustaches on a photo of Valparaiso University President Mark Heckler who agreed to let the library use his visage (see Figure 1).

The interactive elements were all used consistently, and the element that the patrons interacted with the most was the mustache bracket.

Based on the sweet sixteen bracket of the NCAA, the famous mustache vote was dubbed the Mustache Sweet Sixteen and patrons could vote on eight pairs of mustachioed individuals on a 20x30 poster, picking their favorite of the duo. During the first round, the pairs were matched up by type, such as fictional characters or historical figures. The following pairings (elite eight, final four and so on) were determined by the outcomes of the previous votes. Handouts of the Mustache Sweet Sixteen bracket were printed out and made available to patrons as well (see Figure 2).

The voting on the bracket was substantial and surprising, within the first five days, there were 1,056 votes. By the end of the vote, 2,518 had been cast. Voting in almost all the displays detailed here was continually the most active component in the interactivity; this may be because of the subject material for voting, or it may simply be the easiest way to interact.

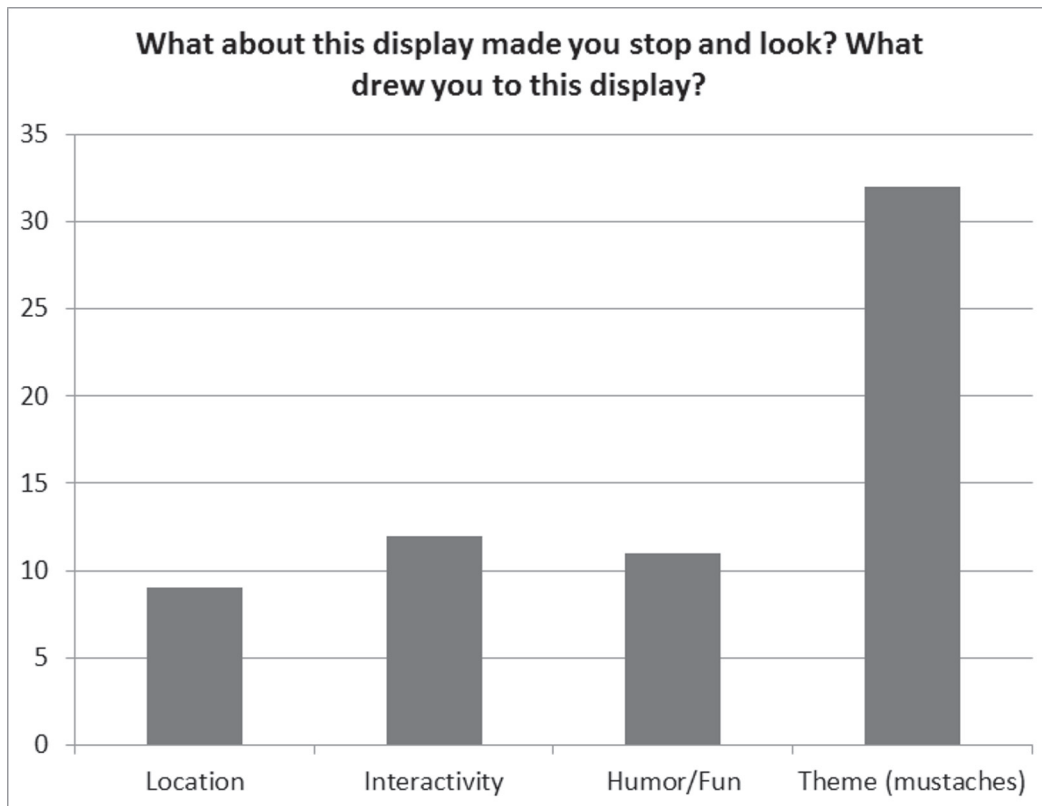
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Figure 2. The NCAA style bracket for the Mustache Sweet Sixteen



While a physical display was the main emphasis here, digital aspects were not ignored. Concurrently the library’s Facebook page displayed the mustache bracket: each day, a different pairing was put on Facebook, complete with images, and the users were asked to vote by comment. The Facebook brackets produced eighteen total votes compared to the votes by the physical brackets: 2,518. The Facebook posts also gathered nine likes, discounting the five likes from library employees. However, at the time the library’s Facebook page was sparsely populated, so the mere fact of having daily postings increased visibility, which was considered a success even though there was not a lot of interaction. According to Facebook’s Insights, the thirteen posts that were mustache display related, which included the online

Figure 3. Mustache display responses to survey question, “What drew you to this display?”



vote, were seen an average of 264 times. When equated to the library’s gate count for the same time period, there is no comparison: in person the display was seen as many as 10,029 times during the month.

To gauge patrons’ interest in this type of academic display, a survey was offered which was approved by Valparaiso University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix 1). The survey was available for the entire month of the display and gathered eighty-seven responses. When asked what drew them to the display, what specifically had made them stop and look, patrons’ answers were varied (see Figure 3).

Within the category of location, there were responses which included, “It was in my way and I couldn’t help looking @ it” and “central location”. Many patrons saw the display simply because it was in the main thoroughfare. The category of interactivity included responses such as, “We have a chance to do something hands-on with the material, which is extra fun!” Interactivity may not always be drawing patrons to the display, but it appears to be a viable reason for them to stay. At least one patron was brought in purely because: “My friend found it and showed it to me because of its ridiculousness.” Another patron echoed this sentiment and praised its uniqueness, “Mustaches are a funny, unexpected topic that you wouldn’t think you would find in the library.” The largest numbers of patrons surveyed were drawn to the display simply because of the theme, shown by responses such as, “Mustaches rock!” Patrons were also asked if they interacted with the display. Three quarters said yes (sixty-six) to those who said no (twenty-one).

Patrons were next asked if they would prefer displays that were more academic or informational in nature or did they prefer humorous displays such as the mustache display. 48 respondents preferred

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Figure 4. A patron is shown interacting with the mustache display



only humor, while one preferred academic. However, thirty-eight respondents said they would prefer a combination of academic and humorous displays. The educational display cannot and should not be left aside for the popularity of the humorous display.

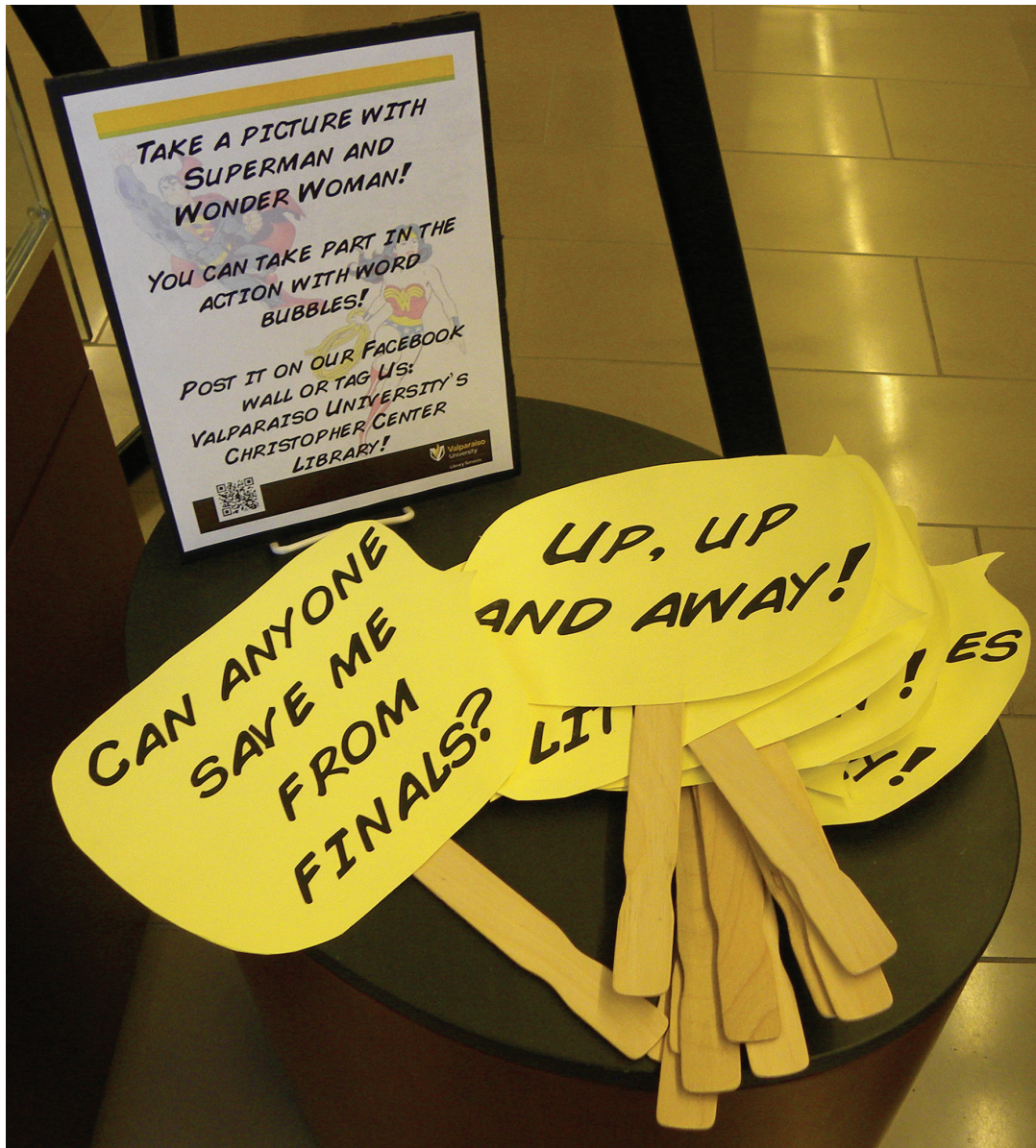
Overall, this analog display was a success, gauging by the amount of patron participation: voting, surveys and interacting with the other posters were all readily apparent. The display was even included in tours of the building for prospective students. Overheard comments from student tour guides included, “What they’ve been doing is a fun exhibit during finals.” and “The library staff really tries to make it fun so that you’re not too stressed when you study here.” To be included in this capacity shows the level of interest by the students. Most importantly, the level of successful patron interaction with this display proved that not only did the patrons appreciate an analog display, they found it entertaining, and entertaining enough to take time out of their day to connect with it, and therefore with other students (see Figure 4).

In looking at the levels of interaction between the analog display and the voting components that were on Facebook, it was clear that the library should focus on and emphasize analog displays going forward.

The CCLIR Celebrates Superheroes

The next combination of stress relief and analog display techniques was used in the irreverent finals display of spring 2013. The theme for this year was superheroes and the library was able to partner with a local comic book shop who loaned several superhero items that were put in a locked display cube.

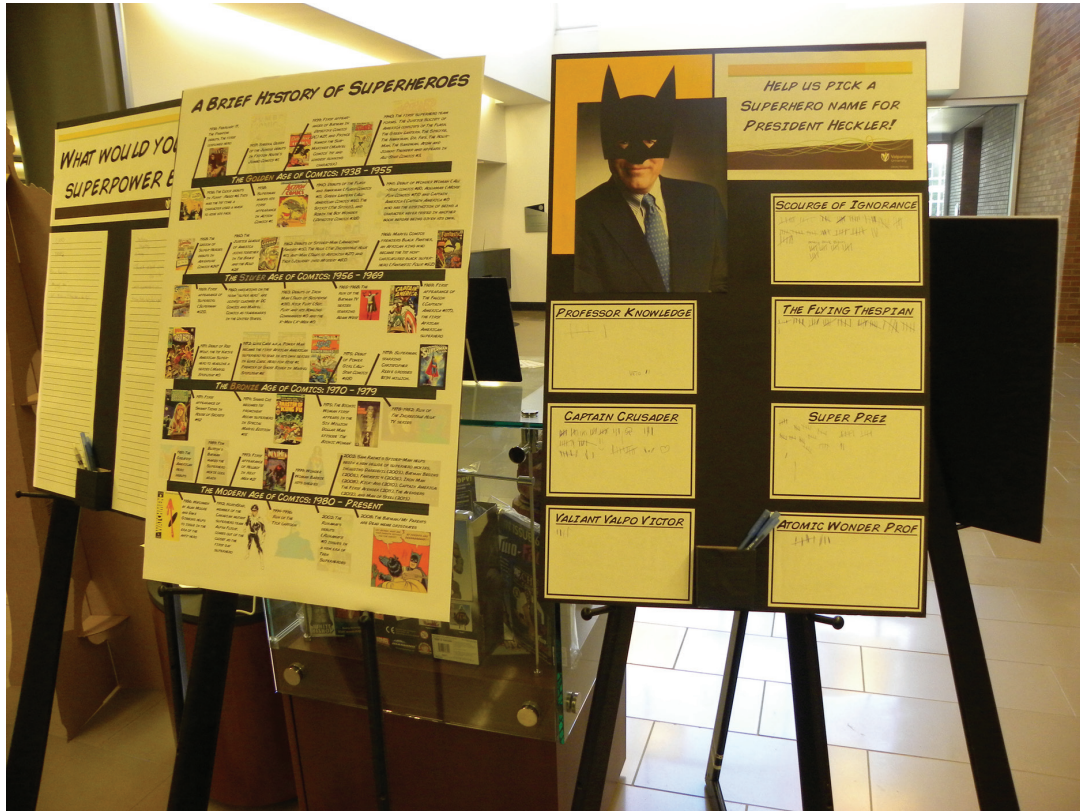
Figure 5. Speech bubbles to interact with the cardboard cutout superheroes



Library materials on display ranged from collections of superhero comics to vinyl record albums of superhero radio plays to George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman*. Two students who had recently completed academic scholarship on the subject of superheroes were contacted and the library obtained permission to add copies of their academic papers to the display. Large cardboard cutouts of Superman and Wonder Woman were purchased and used in a major interactive element of the display; speech bubbles a la comic books were created with fun sayings like “Real Superheroes Use the Library” and “Can anyone save me from finals?!” (See Figure 5).

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Figure 6. Interactive elements from the Superheroes display, featuring the vote for a superhero name for Valparaiso University President Heckler

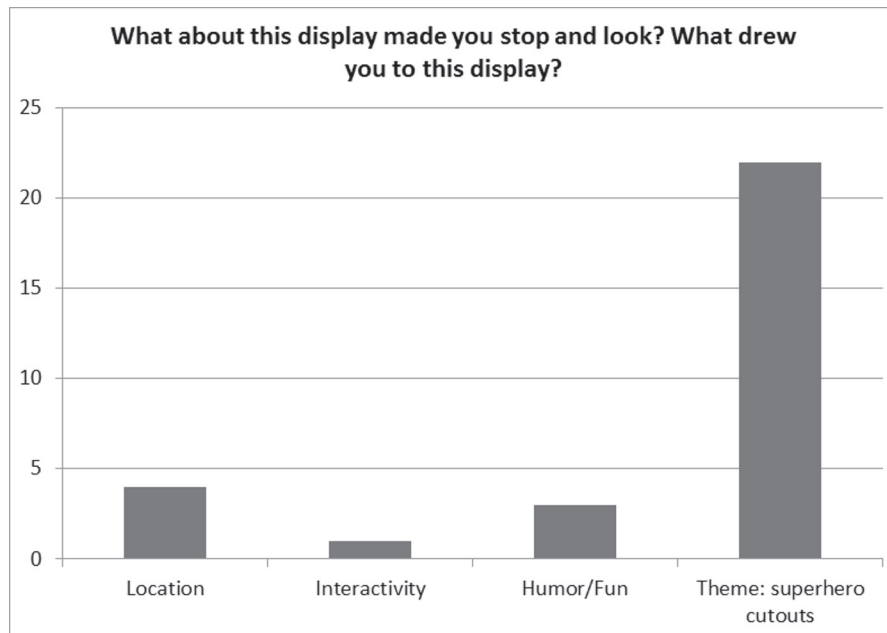


Patrons could pose with the superheroes; a sign asked them to post any pictures taken to Facebook or other social media and tag the library. The other interactive elements required patrons to once again write on poster boards. This time University President Heckler agreed to let patrons vote on a superhero name for him. The names, such as The Flying Thespian (the President’s background is in Theater) and Scourge of Ignorance, were selected ahead of time to combat any malicious entries.

Yet again the voting activity proved to be the most popular, there were a total of 562 votes for President Heckler’s superhero name (see Figure 6).

There was also much chatter on the open ended question boards. One issue that was noticed was the reluctance of patrons to be the first person to write on a board. This reluctance was solved when the display creator added a handwritten response to each question, this need to respond to someone’s writing is as much a prompt as the question itself. The question “What would your super power be?” elicited thirty-seven responses and included molecular manipulation and flight, amongst others. The second poster which asked, “Who’s your favorite superhero?” garnered 155 votes, and the responses were also very interesting. The comments listed the usual suspects of superheroes like Superman and Batman, but they also enumerated names which were not superheroes in the traditional sense, like Dr. Who, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and El Chapukin Colorado. The patrons may have been naming their favorites, but they were also answering in order to be read by their fellow students. Within this naming of superheroes there was definitely the sense of one-upmanship. The superhero cardboard cutouts proved extremely popular,

Figure 7. Superhero display responses to survey question, “What drew you to this display?”



and attracted a lot of attention. Patrons could be seen consistently around Superman and Wonder Woman and frequently took photographs. However, even with the sign asking them to post their photos to the library’s Facebook page, few did. Also observed was a level of interaction no one expected: one of the superhero speech bubbles, which were cardstock mounted on paint sticks, was spotted at that spring’s commencement, being used as a fan by a parent.

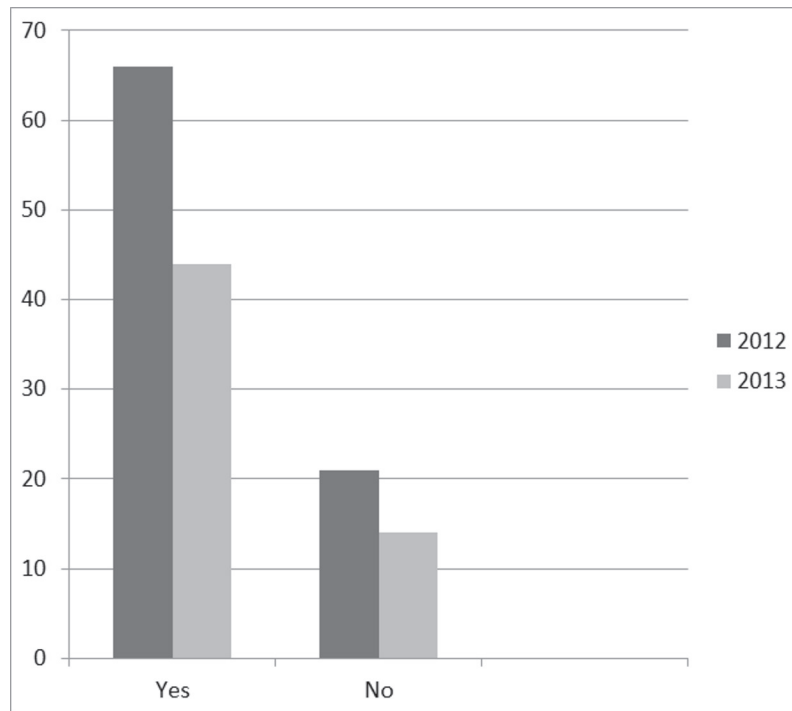
Based on the mustache display’s low level of student interaction on Facebook, the irreverent spring finals display for 2013’s existence on the social media platform was scaled back. Instead of asking for comments on a topic, stories and trivia about superheroes were posted from other sites. This was on topic, but required much less time and effort to procure. There were no comments posted and eleven likes, the amount was fairly consistent with the year before. The five pictures of patrons posing with the cardboard superheroes that were posted by either the patrons or library services, gathered much more attention with twenty-nine likes; however, fourteen of these likes were from library faculty and staff. Overall the Facebook numbers were once miniscule in comparison to the in-person. During the month of the display, Facebook posts were seen an average of 188 times while the CCLIR gate count put the physical display in the pathway of 10,856 passersby.

To compare to the previous year’s statistics, the same survey was given in 2013, and was once again IRB approved. There were fewer responses, with fifty-eight surveys returned. The responses to the display draw question were less varied (see Figure 7).

Location yielded the rationale that the display was, “right smack dab in the middle of the room”. The categories of interactivity and humor or fun had very little response. As was the previous year, patrons were most drawn to this display by the theme, or in this case, the large symbolic cardboard cutouts. The life sized superheroes were popular: “The Huge Cardboard cut-outs. They’re kind of hard to miss.” and

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Figure 8. Survey question on interactivity, by year



“I walked in and Superman was looking me in the eyes, so I had to see what was going on.” Clearly this was a successful display component.

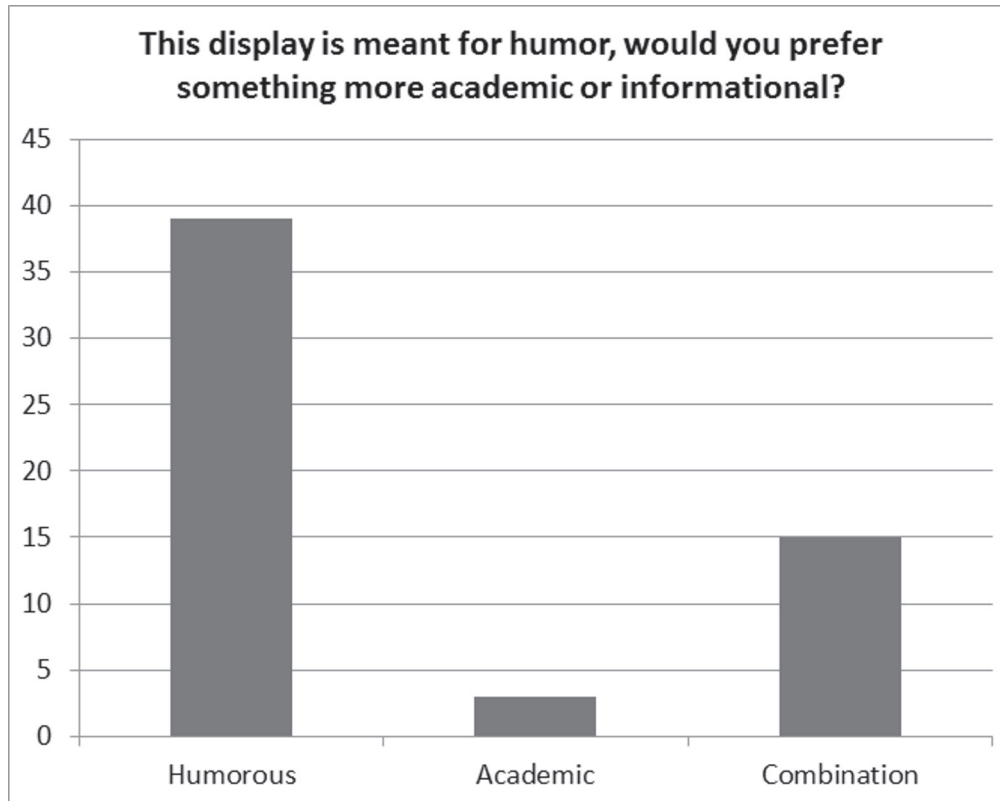
While the Superhero display’s survey had fewer participants than the previous year, the amount of patrons who did and did not interact with the display remained the same (see Figure 8).

Interestingly, although the actual numbers are different, the percentages are very similar: in both years 76% of respondents interacted with the display, while 24% did not. In this survey, there were more votes for humorous displays (see Figure 9) and the two most interesting comments came from those who wanted a combination and showed two sides of the same coin: “I thought this was academic. Culture is portrayed thru comics & tells alot about American society thru the ages (sic)” and “You can turn this into academic. For example spiderman is all about genetics transmutation, superman is about life on different planets, and batman is about human behavior and psychology.” The two different views are shown here, from two different subject areas, the sciences and the social sciences, show how humor can be education.

Take a Break from Studying and be a Kid Again!

The 2014 irreverent spring finals display was a little different, for one there was no voting component; it was to be an experiment in different levels of interactivity. In looking at current pop culture trends and the relative age of the main constituency of undergraduates, the 2014 irreverent spring finals library display used 1990s nostalgia to help the patrons “Be a Kid Again”. A student assistant was most helpful in this regard, as an undergraduate who and had grown up in the late 1990s, she had insights that would otherwise have gone overlooked.

Figure 9. Superhero survey question on type of display desired. Examples of informational displays were Constitution Day or Darwin Day.

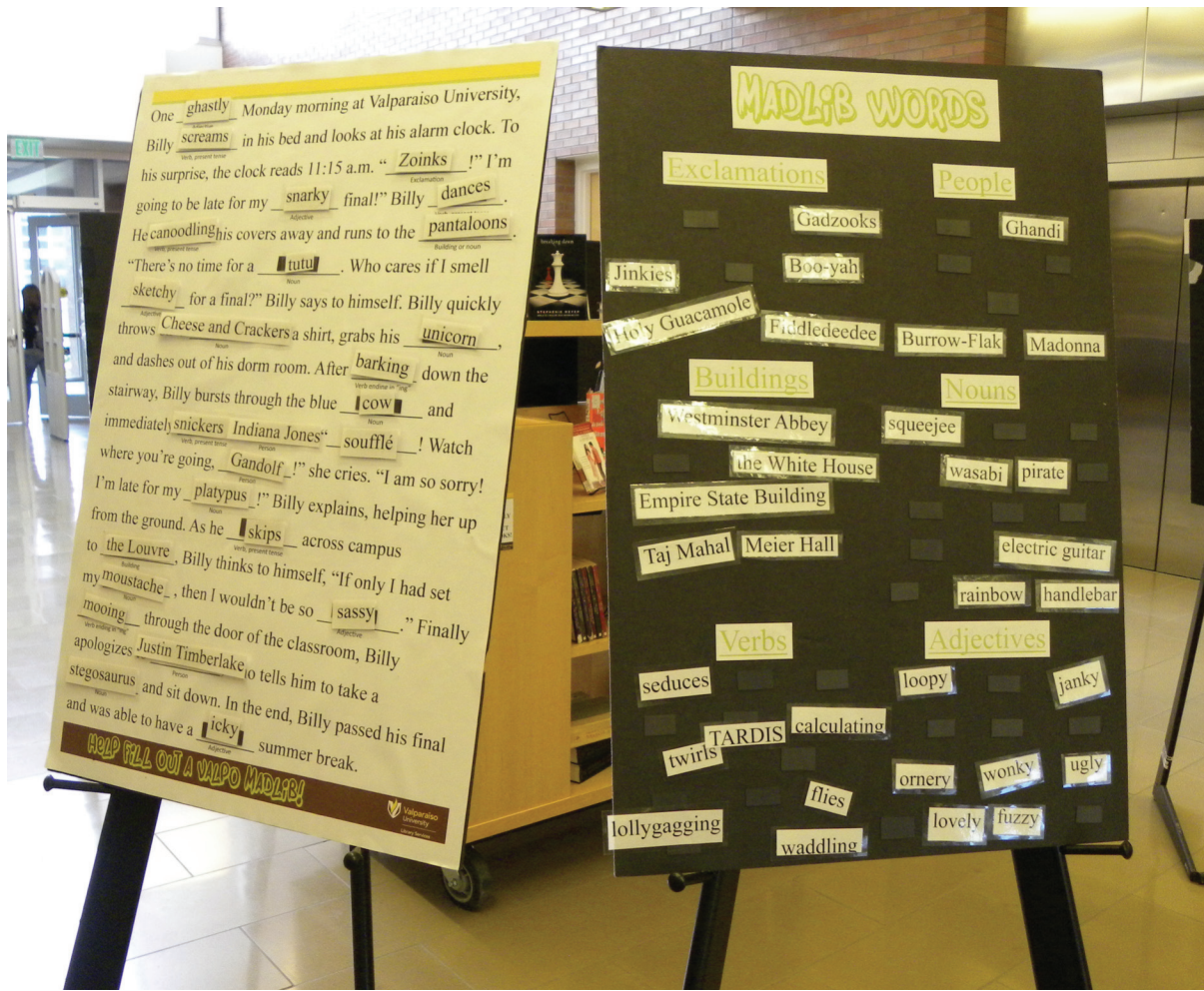


There were three different interactive elements, two repeated and two new to this display. The repeated elements were poster boards that asked for interaction and a MadLib which echoed the “Pin the mustache on the president” game, while the new elements were a noisy activity and a contest. On theme, a board was built around the 1990s problems internet meme. The meme took a still image from the network television show *Dawson’s Creek* where actor James Van Der Beek is crying dramatically and combined it with an ironic issue that could only take place during the 1990s. A good example of one of these “problems” is “I want to go online, but my mom’s on the phone.” The board was filled with thirty-two copies of this meme, twenty-eight blank and four already filled in as a prompt. The patrons took to this quickly and within the first week the entire board was filled. Additional blank versions were added and filled in by patrons, forty-five in total. The MadLib was a story written in-house detailing a student who wakes up late for a final and rushes to the class. Key words were missing from the story and groups of corresponding words were supplied so patrons could finish the story using magnets; many of these words were Valparaiso University centric. While it was hard to judge continuous engagement with this element, many patrons were observed reading and changing words, and the story’s empty spaces were always full (see Figure 10).

The new noisy element was simple but universal: boards were covered in layers of bubble wrap with instructions for patrons to pop if they needed some quick stress relief. This proved to be by far the most

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Figure 10. Interaction on the Valparaiso University centric MadLib



popular component of this display and a total of five boards had to be created due to bubble exhaustion (see Figure 11).

After previously experimenting with unsuccessful Facebook contests, the question was whether this level of apathy would carry over into an analog contest. Two contests were devised within the theme of being a kid again, a coloring contest and a caption contest. In-house created coloring pages were set out with directions and a bowl of crayons. In the caption contest, patrons were asked to caption images chosen from popular 1990s television shows. With both contests, patrons would put their email address on the back of their entry and would receive some retro candy if their entry was picked. Ten patrons entered the coloring contest, while the caption contest received fifty-four entries. Based on the lack of response to the Facebook contests, it was decided that there would be no Facebook component to the display.

An IRB approved survey which compared social media to physical displays was also done for this display, but the questions varied from the previous two years (see Appendix 2). There was a concern that patrons were becoming fatigued with the same questions. The spring 2014 survey only elicited twenty-

Figure 11. Patron interacting with the bubble wrap board



nine responses. A modified online survey was posted on Facebook, and gathered only one response (see Appendix 3).

Patrons were first asked their primary purpose in using the library, and were given an array of choices (see Figure 12).

These results correlate with what has been discussed previously: students primarily use the library as a place of study and research. In a similar question and response to the previous survey, when asked what drew them to the display, the patrons once again mostly stated that it was an element relating to the “Be a kid again” theme. This time most respondents cited the bubble wrap as the reason they initially looked at the display.

Another interest was the level of communication between the patrons; did they feel connected to other patrons? Did they feel any sense of community? The survey asked about communication with other students, via the display (see Figure 13).

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Figure 12. Responses to the “Be a Kid Again” display survey question, “When you go to the library, what is your primary purpose?” Grinders is the CCLIR’s café.

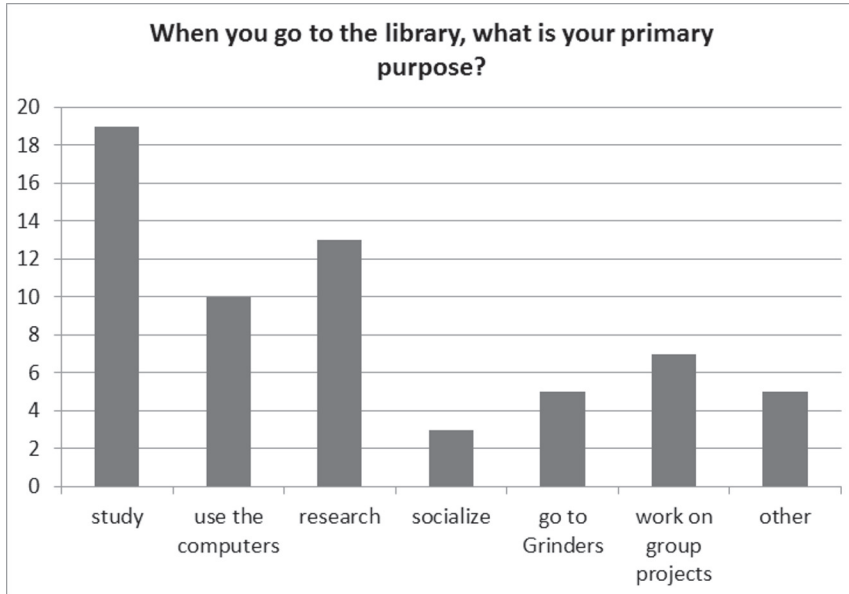


Figure 13. Responses to the “Be a Kid Again” display survey question about communicating with other students through the display

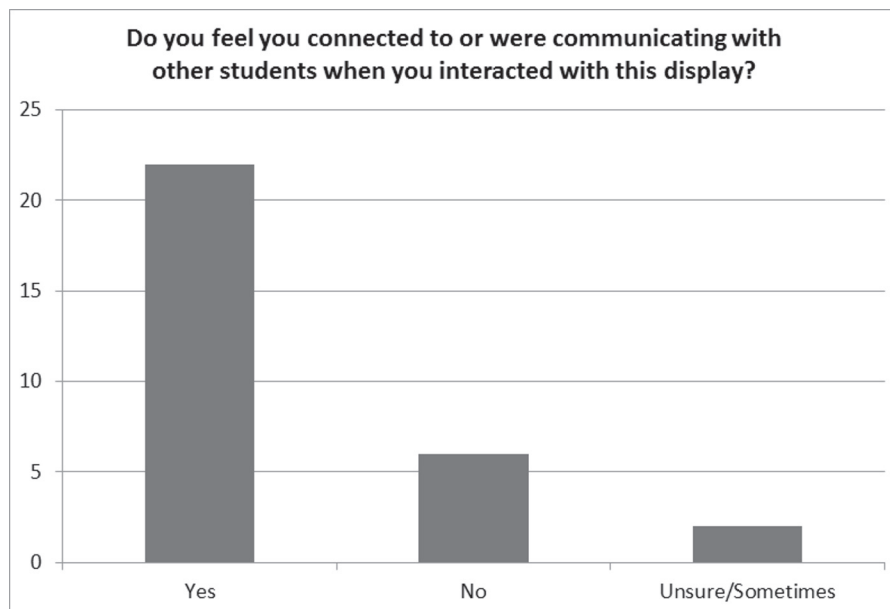
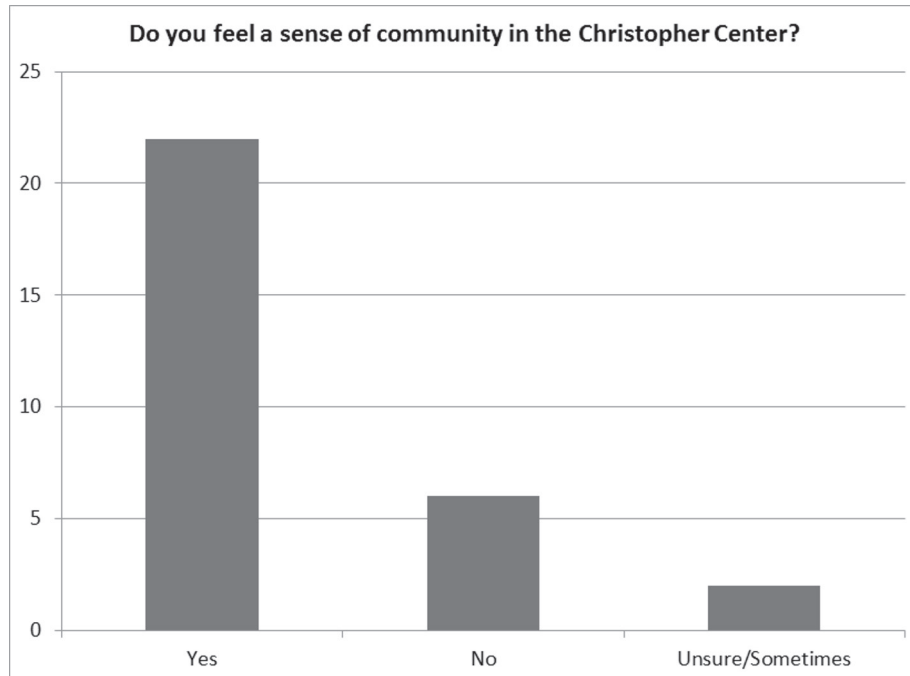


Figure 14. Responses to the survey question about community in the CCLIR. Patrons were also asked why or why not?



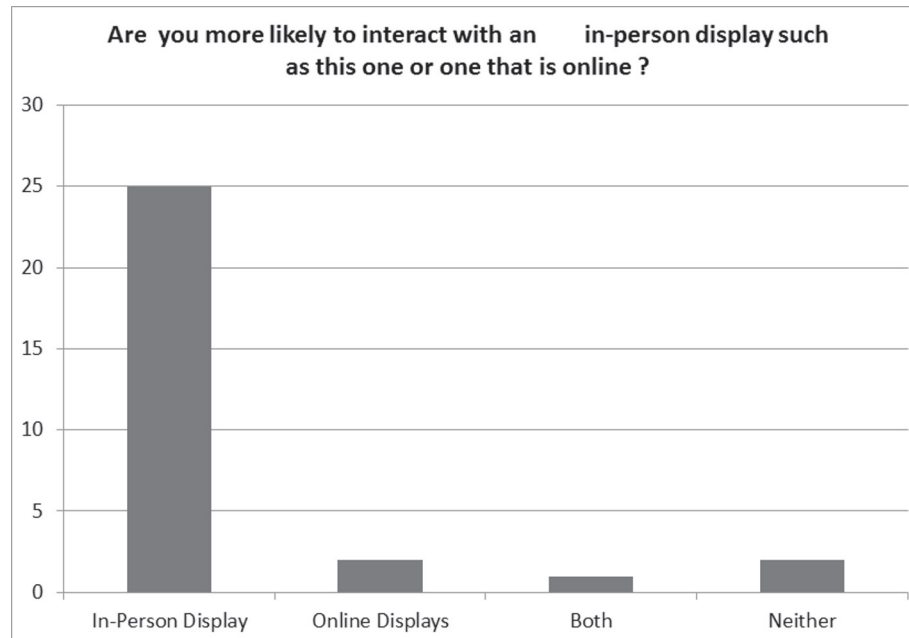
Those who responded no did not elaborate on why, but the yes answers elaborated, with responses such as “yes, I loved seeing all the responses” and “Not at the display, but in a conversation afterward.” This last response demonstrates the effects that a display could have after students leave its physical proximity. The most thought-provoking “maybe” response was, “Sort of, I guess I haven’t really talked about it.” This patron identifies communication as only verbal, but just the action of interacting with the display itself communicates with other patrons. Students are unaware of the community created by these displays.

In taking this discussion further, patrons were asked if they felt a sense of community within the CCLIR, and the majority did (see Figure 14).

Patrons were asked to further elaborate their response. Those patrons who said “yes” found the CCLIR to be a place “for the benefit of the students – we all have common ground here” and one that’s “always buzzing with social activity.” The patrons who responded “no” were in one of two camps, either they felt that others were unfriendly which did not constitute a community, “No one likes to talk or be friendly unless you know them” or that the library itself could not be a community: “Valpo itself is a community. Christopher Center is a place to study. It’s still a fun place to be though.” Another patron who responded no, did so with a dubious, “It’s the library?” when asked why not. One of the most interesting responses came from a patron who said there was “kind of” a community in the CCLIR: “I work here. Or I come here w/friends. So I bring my own community, yo!” Patrons are unaware of the community within the CCLIR even while participating in it.

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Figure 15. Responses the survey question, “Are you more likely to interact with an in-person or online display?” Examples of on-line displays in the question were images in an online gallery and library contests over Facebook.



Patrons were next asked if they were more likely to interact with an in-person display or one that was online. Consistent with what has been observed, 83% of patrons preferred the in-person displays (see Figure 15).

An attention-grabbing comment from someone who favored online displays was “People don’t see me do it”. In trying to mimic the security of anonymous comments in analog displays, one thing that librarians cannot control are the patrons in the physical space. In looking at the responses that preferred in-person displays, the top reasons behind that decision were location, “because it’s right there in front of you”, and “because I don’t have the option to just click off of it.” The greatest number of responses centered on the overabundance of material on line: “There’s a lot of online community, but in-person still feels nice and not as worn-out”. This comment cites the online community, but not the in-person one. One of the most intriguing comments on the subject came from the one patron who filled out the online survey, who echoed what the previous survey found about humor and academic displays: “I know it’s easy to do it online, but I feel like the point of a display [is] to balance the library’s academic function with something more fun, and you really go to the library for that stuff, so it’s a nice break and make the display that much more eye-catching or effective. I think most people would sk[i]p over a FB /Twitter/Tumblr post about VU’s library, but if they’re already there, they will stop and participate.” Overall these messages clearly confirm what has been observed, that students connect more to analog displays than digital ones.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Displays and the Unconscious Community

Academic libraries should have aspects of both the communal and the social in the physical building, and analog displays can help accomplish this. In a very obvious way, the interactive elements of the display would be a social activity. In going back to Gayton’s definitions, it can be considered a group activity; it is only sometimes studious and can definitely be noisy. There is also the potential for a communal component. Every display theme, no matter how ridiculous, does have an educational section to it; it does contain factual information that can create a learning experience. The information learned may be that Ambrose Burnside is the reason for the term sideburns, the linear history of superhero comics or simply that a specific collection of books from a student’s childhood represents a time and a place in a way they hadn’t connected before; there is the ability to learn something.

Many students who enter the building in a quest for solitary study may also approach the display in the same manner: they interact with it alone. However, that interaction with the display turns it into a social activity. They may be seen interacting, which could spur another patron to interact or to talk to that student after the fact. Unless they are the first person to write on a board, they will read what others have written which in and of itself is a shared social experience. Since the displays are located in the main lobby of the CCLIR, a student could potentially enter expecting only communal activities, experience a social activity and then commence the communal, hopefully with the sense that the library is trying to facilitate community in the building.

Displays help students realize that the library is a comfortable place, for either solitary or social activities, and it is a creative place that welcomes their input, no matter how lighthearted. Oldenberg (1997) specifically speaks to that comfort level and college campuses, that the level of ease and security for the students to be themselves, no matter what their background, is what makes good conversation and thus community. Displays can help shape this conversation, either through students talking about displays within or even without the library context, or students “talking” to their compatriots through interactive parts of the display. A term from psychology can be adapted to fit here as well. Milgram (1977) coined the term familiar strangers to mean those people whom one regularly sees but have no level of interaction; they are the familiar faces in the crowd. Within this academic library community, students may start out as familiar strangers, but through displays they become part of an unconscious community, because via the displays, they do interact.

According to Jung (1959), the collective unconscious is instinctual; humans are born with a certain amount of inherited traits, symbols or archetypes and experiences that are universal but of which humans are unaware. The idea of the unconscious community is similar to this Jungian concept. These students are unaware of the community displays help build, but it is a common experience, something they are, in fact, sharing together. The student’s written comments and responses to prompts/questions may be influenced by the earlier participants’ writings. They then may return and check for responses and comments to their own writings, not unlike checking their Facebook wall, and thus creating an environment of one-upmanship and influence, leading to new and shared ideas. Humans are social creatures and intrinsically crave interaction. Displays are an easy, creative, and cost-effective way to facilitate this interaction.

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Other sociological terms can define the elements that define the unconscious community. Goffman (1963) gives the terms “disembodied messages” and “copresence”, both of which take place in the unconscious community. Disembodied messages are ones that exist after the entity giving the information has stopped, such as a letter. Copresence refers to the act of sensing when individuals are close enough to each other to observe what the other is doing, to detect that the other individual notices them and that both are aware of this observation. Both these terms can help define what takes place with the students and the displays in the CCLIR. The boards that the students interact with in writing can be considered disembodied messages; those messages exist and are being read long after the person who wrote them has communicated. Those written comments may only be a moment’s work, but they have a longer impact than that fleeting instant. When they are read by someone else, that person may have a reaction, whether it is to laugh or to write a comment in response. At that juncture, they are in communication with each other. They are in the same community. Copresence also can take place during a student’s time interacting with displays. The obvious occasion would be when there are two or more students at the display itself, but the copresence of a student interacting with the display may spur others to do the same; it can generate a level of interest not previously there. “In a certain way, these exhibits are not only constituted in and through interaction among companions, but are encountered and perceived with regard to the actions and orientations of all those sharing the same local environment” (vom Lehn, Heath & Hindmarsh, 2001, p.207). In following the urge to see what other students are doing, that student enters the community.

Libraries are unique in the community they attract, which is, in a word, everyone. Libraries provide all information to all people. The students who come to the CCLIR have vastly different interests and backgrounds and may not be able to interact with others without the common area, the third place, which is the library (Demas & Scherer, 2002). The CCLIR’s displays can interact with this entire cross section of the student body and help make them realize that they are a part of the library community. When a student is alone in a study carrel on the quiet floor, are they really alone? Or are they still connected to a number of communities? Friends texting, postings on various social media sites, people who pass by on the same floor of the library: these are all communities that the student is a part of, even unconsciously. Students may not interact with anyone in the building, but they are drawn here, to study in this third place. Librarians must communicate with them using the tools available. Digital/social media has been the focus of so much research up until now, but how are students reached in the physical space? Displays in the library provide a personal experience, one that is tactile, sensual and real. Community needs to be built with all users of the physical space as well as those who communicate with the library online.

Community lies within the social parts of the academic library; it is something that can be both seen and heard. It has been shown that in the CCLIR, students want both the social areas and solitary places where they can study. However, even if they are alone and prefer to be that way, they are still in the building, and even if they do not communicate verbally with anyone, they are still part of the library community. They may be just one of the familiar strangers, but they may also be a somewhat larger part of the community by interacting with the displays. A display is for all patrons, it allows a singular student to communicate with others, even when they are not present (boards, contests, etc.); there does not need to be a group to have this conversation. Students continuously build their own community. No matter what is put up as a display, the students will make it their own in ways never thought of, and have no qualms in doing so. Clearly they feel some level of comfort in and ownership of the building.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While the Millennium Generation is academic library’s current constituency, shortly most of them will have passed beyond the level of undergraduate. Soon the students who have been deemed Generation Z will be entering the doors of higher education and the academic library. While the name is obviously a continuation on Generation Y, differences between Generation Z and their predecessors are already being foretold. They will require new learning methods, expect a different level of virtual interaction from their teachers and classrooms and their response to information will also be a change from the Millennials, as they will need to learn to deal with constant changes in the information stream (Dillion, 2007). They will be even more integrated into technology, the experts say, for them, “...technology isn’t just cool stuff to play with, it’s something many will never have been without; it’s a thing woven into the fabric of their lives” (Dixon, 2014). What does this mean for analog displays? Will Generation Z reject them outright? Or will they, like their predecessors, remain intrigued?

Nostalgia can be a powerful draw, as one seeks comfort in times of stress. Nostalgia does not have to be for a time period in one’s own past. It has been shown that popular culture is on a twenty year cycle; the 1990s wanted to emulate the 1970s and today’s pop culture harkens back to the 1990s (Andersen, 2013). These new Generation Z students may be nostalgic for a time period they could not possibly remember. An analog display that uses this nostalgia may be welcomed by this generation; it may seem quaint and comfortable. There is the possibility that these analog displays will be overruled by Generation Z, in which case the library will have to find new ways to reach these students and create a community.

One new way to enter the digital realm would be to consider online digital exhibition tools to reach the students outside of social media. The CCLIR already has a subscription to contentDM, which could be explored for online displays. Other tools to explore include free open-source software such as Omeka or Open Exhibits. There will probably still have to be a social media component to this, however, as putting a display online will mean a larger marketing campaign as the students cannot just stumble upon it in the lobby.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that students do not want a relationship with the digital library; Facebook pages are a flaccid relationship and students have not been excited about the online elements librarians thought they would, like Second Life. It has also been observed that the students want to be individuals when they come to the library, and many times they want to be alone. All libraries also have students who only grace its doorsteps after normal business hours, often after the librarians have gone home for the night. A student may never meet or interact with a librarian in their entire academic career, but could see these analog displays and, realize that no matter what time of day, the library is trying to communicate with them and build multiple student communities.

How can librarians bring students together? Analog displays can achieve this. Displays can take all aspects of something the students would want to see online, such as memes, pop culture references, anonymous commenting, and put them in the physical realm, and a very specific physical realm at that. Only those who use this specific library can be a part of this community. The positioning of a display where the students cannot avoid it almost forces the issue of community, but makes it simpler. A student may not come to the library during finals week to be a part of a community, the idea is to study alone

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in a third space academic environment. However, even if the student is only entering the building with that intent, they are already part of a community of like-minded students. But suddenly, there in front of them, is a display that cannot be missed. It is easy to interact with, to read what others have written and to write something of their own. Doing this unconsciously makes them part of the community; they know what they are writing will be read by other students and they intrinsically are writing it for other students to read.

Even the simple act of popping some bubble wrap can make the student enter the community: others will see them and smile, sharing a similar feeling. The bubble wrap popping can be heard at a great distance, piquing the interest of other students or reliving a fond memory because they have already done that activity and are being reminded to do it again. These gestures may seem flippant or arbitrary, but in their own small way, they are building a community in the library.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to acknowledge Annie Stanchak and Emily Hardesty, library student assistants who were instrumental in the creation of displays during their tenure.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Analog: Traditional, display mediums that require physical manipulation and interaction.

Boards: Typically a 20x30 foam board, these versatile display element can hold more than just a large size poster, but can support interactivity in various forms.

Digital: The opposite of analog; internet and server based activities, be they observing a display or communicating on social media.

Display: Produced in-house, built around a singular theme. It does not necessarily have an educational component; displays can be just for fun, many times with specific interactive elements.

Exhibit: Curated rather than produced, and the library is often partnered with an outside organization to put it on. It typically consists of historical artifacts with panel descriptions; they tell a story of a specific point in time, with an educational component.

Meme: A cultural reference in graphical form, usually humorous; its popularity spreads from person to person, usually over websites such as Facebook or Tumblr.

Unconscious Community: Entered when people interact with others who may not necessarily be present, such as reacting to others’ comments on a board, which places both parties into a community, even if they do not realize they are a part.

APPENDIX 1

1) Have you ever noticed any of the displays that are in the Christopher Center?

Yes No

If so, which ones? Please circle: Constitution Day Banned Books Week Darwin Day Earth Week Other:

2) What about this display made you stop and look? What drew you to this display?

3) Did you interact with this display (other than taking this survey)?

4) What do you think about displays in the library? Are they worth putting up?

5) This display is meant for humor, would you prefer something more academic or informational such as the Darwin Day or Constitution Day displays?

6) Do you have any suggestions for future displays?

APPENDIX 2

When you come to the library, what is your primary purpose? (study, use the computers, research, socialize, go to Grinders, group projects, other_____)

What drew you to this display?

When you look at this display, you think: The library is _____.

Did you feel you connected to or were communicating with other students when you interacted with this display?

Are you more likely to interact with an in-person display such as this one or one that is online (images in an online gallery, library contests over facebook)? Why or why not?

Do you feel a sense of community in the Christopher Center? Why or why not?

APPENDIX 3

When you come to the library, what is your primary purpose? (study, use the computers, research, socialize, go to Grinders, group projects, other_____)

What would draw you to look at a display?

What words come to mind when you think about this library?

Do you feel you connect to or are communicating with other students when you interact with library displays?

Are you more likely to interact with an in-person display (answering a question on a posterboard or entering a coloring contest) or one that is online (images in an online gallery, library contests over facebook)?

Do you feel a sense of community in the Christopher Center? Why or why not?