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Helen Salmon
University of Guelph Library, hsalmon@uoguelph.ca

Linda Graburn
University of Guelph Library, lgraburn@uoguelph.ca

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Creating the Sandbox: The Juxtaposition of Collections and Student Development

Helen Salmon, Information Resources Librarian, University of Guelph Library

Linda Graburn, Information Resources Librarian, University of Guelph Library

Abstract

While academic library collections are typically built and assessed in relation to pedagogical or curricular needs and accreditation processes, they can also be intentionally developed, accessed, and promoted with more conscious attention to the developmental needs and context of the students who will use them. This paper will explore the roles that academic library collections play in relation to the psychosocial development of young adults. Drawing upon contemporary learning and young adult development theory, we will situate the role of academic library collections in relation to the various developmental stages, tasks, and learning challenges that young adults experience during a typical university experience. We will also explore how traditional ways of selecting, promoting, and providing access to library collections can be modified to create more direct and meaningful engagement for our students as they struggle to define themselves and to consider "where do we go from here?" for their generation.

Traditional Library Roles

Since their beginnings, universities have served as centers for the transmission and exchange of existing knowledge and for exploring and codifying new forms of knowledge. Libraries have traditionally supported this role by preserving the thoughts and writings of scholars (and society in general) and by providing a means for knowledge across many disciplines to be shared, preserved, and re-accessed across the centuries. As storehouses of knowledge, libraries and their collections help to preserve and reinforce the prevailing norms, thoughts, and social beliefs of a specific time and place. They thus serve an important social acculturation role in helping to educate and support the intellectual, emotional, and even moral growth of young adults as they prepare to enter the working world and to define themselves as individuals and as contributing members of society.

Modern academic libraries typically develop their collections very consciously and programmatically—to meet accreditation requirements, to support the university's formal teaching curriculum and research programs, and to enable program or course learning objectives. Allocation formulas, approval plans, and liaisons with academic departments all ensure that library collection budgets are aligned with the formal curriculum of the university and that purchasing of resources is largely confined to discipline-specific academic content. Reaching further into the past, however, university libraries served a more general societal role in supporting the development of the "whole" student, building collections which would promote literacy and engender the ability to think, debate, and develop moral reasoning and life skills beyond the formal curriculum. While universities no longer aim to inculcate specific cultural and moral values in their students, they do still serve an important and unique role in providing young adults with a place and a range of experiences which will support their transition into full adulthood. Contemporary academic libraries help to support this role and collaborate in the students' development by providing "spaces" (physical, virtual, collections) and services which allow students to be engaged, inspired, and challenged across multiple developmental domains.

Young Adult Development (Emerging Adulthood)

What are the developmental tasks and challenges of the average college-aged student? The pathway from adolescence to adulthood involves growing maturity and mastery across a number of

psychosocial dimensions, including cognitive/intellectual, emotional, social, sexual, and applied life skills. Profound and sometimes rapid changes in all of these domains occur during the young adult years, and a variety of student development models and theories have been put forward to describe and categorize this stage of life development, and to try and explain the ways that students grow, develop, and mature during the university years, and in response to the university environment. These theories generally fall into several broad categories, which as a group paint a picture of the profound transitions that take place during young adulthood:

- *Psychosocial* theories of student development seek to define the developmental tasks, issues, and events that occur during young adulthood. Development is seen as a sequence of tasks or events that unfold as chronological age progresses and that is shaped by the individual's environment and significant life experiences. Erik Erikson defined development as occurring through and in response to a series of crises or decision points which provide the stimulus for developmental progression (Erikson, 1959). Arthur Chickering (1969; 1993) drew upon his extensive research with college students in the US to describe seven developmental "vectors" or deepening areas of competence which typify psychosocial developmental throughout the young adult years: these include intellectual competence, managing emotions, growing independence, maturing of interpersonal relationships, a strengthening sense of self-identity and integrity, and developing a sense of vocation in life.

- More recently, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett considered the global nature of the workforce in postindustrial countries and the need for advanced education and training to enter competitive job markets and its impact on the development of young adults. Demographically, there is a related delay in the average age of taking

on the adult roles of marriage, career, and parenthood. Without these social norms and expectations, the early twenties are spent in self-focused exploration of diverse life roles, preparatory to transitioning to these adult roles. He coined the concept of "emerging adulthood" as a new developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2001).

- *Cognitive-structural* theories explore the ways that individuals reason, think, and make sense of their environment and experiences. Development is hierarchical, with one stage each stage scaffolding upon and incorporating the previous stage. Jean Piaget (1958) theorized that the fourth and final stage of cognitive development, or the formal operational stage (from age 12 through to adulthood), sees the emergence of abstract thought and hypothetical reasoning abilities, and the ability to engage in systematic planning. In 1970, William G. Perry, Jr. outlined a sequence of approaches to learning and thinking which students move through as they progress from dualism to multiplicity to contextual relativism (1970). By the end of the university years, students come to understand that diverse opinions or answers need to be considered and weighed relative to their background context—they are not all equally valid. By this stage, decisions are based on an integration and weighing of various perspectives, and all solutions must be supported by reasons.

- In their 1986 book, *Women's ways of knowing: The development of voice, self, and mind,* Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule refined upon Perry's model of intellectual development to recognize more specifically female pathways of cognitive development. "Women's ways of knowing" proposes a developmental pathway progressing from silence (disconnection from knowledge), to

subjective knowledge (recognizing the self and one's own inner feelings and experiences as authority), to procedural knowledge (recognizing that multiple sources of knowledge exist and can be explored and evaluated), to constructed knowledge (recognizing that knowledge is constructed, mutable and contextual).

- *Moral development* theories describe the gradual development of moral reasoning ability, that is, standards of what is right and wrong. Beginning in 1958, and building on Piaget's earlier work, Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) posits a moral ladder of progression in reasoning abilities during the college years through three stages: preconventional (right or wrong is dependent on authority and by the consequences for disobedience or compliance); conventional (morality is defined in conformity with social norms and societal laws); and postconventional (morality is defined in accordance with universal ethical principles and an individual's own principles). In 1982, Carol Gilligan (1982) both built upon and critiqued Kohlberg's work by proposing a theory of women's moral development which contrasted male views of morality, based on individual rights and rules, with female views of morality, based upon the caring aspects of human relationships. For women, Gilligan argued, Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning should be recast as "stages of the ethic of care," whereby young women progress from a selfish viewpoint which valorizes personal survival (the preconventional stage) to a recognition that one has a socially assigned responsibility for others (the conventional stage), to an internalization of the principles of care for oneself and others (the postconventional stage).

- *Person-environment* theories explore the interaction between the person and their environment working together, and assert that positive outcomes for college students are associated with campus environments which encourage student engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), which challenge and support them on multiple levels (Sanford & Adelson, 1962), and which provide a rich integration of academic and social systems (Tinto, 1994). These theories particularly focus on student success in transitioning to the world of work and careers.

- *Experiential learning* theory emphasizes the process by which individual students learn through experience. David Kolb (1984) presents an iterative four-stage experiential learning model which begins with a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation of that experience, followed by abstract conceptualization of that experience, followed by active experimentation based on learning acquired through the experience/reflection phases of the cycle. Kolb further argues that, to be effective, experiential learning must actively involve students, and that they must have the necessary skills (ability to reflect, analyze, and problem-solve) to benefit from the experience. In other words, stages of student development interact with experiences (curricular and noncurricular) in complex and reciprocal ways.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, while the wide range of student development theories provide useful frameworks for understanding the general experiences and processes of emerging adulthood, they also recognize that individual students will be affected by such factors as diversity (culture, ethnicity, gender), individuality (personality, temperament, learning styles, preferences, past experience), and the environment around them (campus climate, involvement in curricular and extracurricular activities). As well, for some students, emerging adulthood is even more complex and offers different and more difficult challenges—specific subgroups of college-aged students have unique needs and challenges. Students with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or mental health issues will require more extensive and more targeted support as they seek to master the usual

developmental tasks of young adulthood. International students entering North American universities face a variety of challenges beyond the normal adult developmental tasks, as they strive to acquire English language and writing skills, understand the academic approaches and expectations of Western universities, navigate the cultural practices and norms of a foreign culture, and establish the new social networks that are such a crucial aspect of the young adult life-stage.

It can be argued that, for all students, the line of demarcation between adolescence and adulthood is perhaps not as sharply defined as it once was, and the current cohort of college students tend to drive their own development more independently and with higher regard to their own developmental and utilitarian needs than that of previous student cohorts. Their style of learning is an iterative one, involving self-reflection and the development and maturation of their own personality constructs, rather than responding solely and passively to a curricular narrative owned and controlled by faculty experts.

Library collections can play a unique and important supporting role in this process of individualized exploration by providing the intellectual raw materials for students to interact with and explore, and to learn about how scholarship is produced and communicated. We need to question the assumption that universities or their libraries can control the ways that users' access and use information, and turn the lens around to view young adulthood from the perspective of our students, recognizing the full spectrum of their development as young adults. Recognizing their usual information-seeking practices, and within the context of their ongoing and unique developmental needs, we can create collections which supplement and complement the generic sources of information available on the Web with scholarly forms of communication, and with information customized to the developmental needs of emerging adults. These collections can be selectively inserted into student learning spaces (point-of-need access through learning management systems). They can also serve in a more general, noncurricular way as an intellectual sandbox for students to explore and

use as they follow their own self-initiated intellectual and developmental pathways.

Campus Partners

If academic libraries seek to integrate their services and collections more deliberately into the overall university mandate to support student development needs, who might our natural campus partners be? Institutions of higher education of course recognize that their students have developmental needs beyond the cognitive and intellectual skills which are developed in the classroom, and student life services play a well-established and important role in identifying and supporting the full range of developmental needs of young adults. The "wellness wheel" model, originally developed by Bill Hettler (1976), is used as a standard model at many North American universities to promote balance for students across the intellectual, social, physical, spiritual, occupational, emotional, and environmental dimensions of life. Academic support skills, life management skills, mental and physical health supports, and social networks all fall within the domain of student life service centers in the modern university, and are seen as a crucial support for recruiting and retaining students through their university career. Other, more specialized units typically address specific types of student development needs—curricular committees deal with the integration of cognitive and learning development into the university's formal course design; and the needs of specialized subgroups of students (international students, student athletes, students with mental or physical challenges, first year students, etc.). All of these units think about student development needs from different perspectives, and all of them have the potential to be partners with their campus library in promoting the awareness, integration, and use of library collections in support of those needs.

Often, however, student life support units are somewhat cut off from the academic life of their university and from each other. They are frequently funded and managed differently than academic departments, and the academic skills promoted in the classroom are seen as separate

and outside of the psychosocial development occurring in other aspects of a student's life. Our students are "whole" persons, but universities do not always do a good job at integrating support and providing student development opportunities in a holistic way across the full university experience. This bifurcation between the "academic" and the "student development" roles of a university can also extend to other academic support units (including libraries) across the university. The obvious role that library collections play in providing resources to support the formal curriculum is well-recognized. Less often recognized and acted upon, though, is the crucial role that academic libraries and their collections can play in providing "beyond the curriculum" support for students as they learn and explore the world around them—trying on and experimenting with new roles and viewpoints, learning how to recognize and integrate the world's complexity and to make choices, learning how to attain information on their own in order to question received wisdom. Even within libraries, front-facing library student support services such as information literacy or reference services tend to be separated from collections services, both in terms of budget alignment and organizational reporting structures. Collections practices and funding are "student focused" only insofar as they support the formal teaching goals of the university; rarely do they consider the needs of students as they make the transition to adulthood through multiple developmental pathways. Very recently, the ACRL framework for information literacy has evolved from a set of generic formal standards (levels of cognitive development) to a model which assesses each student's individual skill levels and personal context for information seeking and usage, recognizing that the student's particular developmental stage and needs should drive the learning process (ACRL, 2015). However, the potential for library collections to play an active and deliberate part in that developmental learning process remains largely underexplored—some possible approaches for using collections in this way will be explored in the remainder of this paper.

Library Roles in Supporting Student Development

Academic library collections can contribute to the "wellness wheel" of student development in many ways. Our collections, and the ways in which we can integrate and supplement them with the full spectrum of information available to society, can help to engender and deepen a number of cognitive skills in the students who work with them. By their very diverse nature, academic library collections expose users to multiple viewpoints on the world. The evaluation and integration of information is not a passive process—collections provide the ability to master information literacy skills in an applied context. By learning how to recognize different points of view, how to judge and evaluate various types and sources of information, and how to evaluate and critically assess the quality of scholarly communication, students develop more sophisticated and pervasive cognitive skills and frameworks for dealing with the world. Through contact with library collections and the development of the practical and cognitive skills needed to find and use information, students gain a deeper understanding of the scholarly communication cycle in general, and ultimately develop threshold concepts for their own academic discipline which can be integrated into their own developing intellectual constructs and sense of self. By providing wide-ranging and generic content that stretches beyond the formal curriculum to address the needs of young adults, libraries can aid the overall mission of the university by helping students to become more comfortable with diversity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, and with charting their own paths of inquiry independently from the requirements of their professors. This is an important developmental step for young adults, and its impact is felt across all of the major psychosocial domains. The ability to debate and to integrate varying perspectives, to support an argument with evidence, to understand the cultural and societal constructs which frame their society, and the basic ability to find and use information which

meets both academic and personal needs—all of this can be supported by interaction with the raw materials represented by an academic library collection.

We can further promote intellectual growth and self-mastery of learning goals in a more applied way by inviting students and staff in other campus support units (student life, counseling services, wellness units) to become active partners in building those collections, through the use of patron-driven acquisitions purchasing models or active solicitation of student requests for leisure reading collections. We can enable access to library collections in ways which will deliberately enhance student engagement across multiple psychosocial domains and which will recognize and accommodate many different styles of learning. Something as simple as the harmony between the visual and physical elements of an academic resource and its intellectual content (whether it is a book, an e-journal, an e-book, or a streaming media object) can be a powerful shaper of a student's experience with it. The placement of physical collections and their integration with well-designed study and learning spaces, the promotion and visibility of leisure collections, and the provision of e-book platforms which engage students on functional and emotional levels as well as providing academic content—all of these approaches to acquiring and managing collections can have a direct (albeit not always obvious) impact on the learning and social environment of the university and the ability of students to successfully navigate the transition into adulthood.

The role of academic libraries as social learning spaces has been well-recognized over the past few decades, as they have been gradually evolving from a warehousing role (for print collections) to a role which prioritizes the creation of active student study and learning spaces. In addition to their traditional role of providing intellectual fodder for students' cognitive and moral development, university libraries now actively provide a range of physical and intellectual spaces where students can meet, encounter and test new ideas, engage in group learning activities, and form social networks which help to support them

as they master the developmental tasks of young adulthood. The transformation of library collections space to support this type of active learning has been made possible by the careful and conscious management of print legacy collections. Most North America academic libraries have reduced their print collections footprint by adopting such strategies as offsite storage, resource sharing with other institutions, weeding of low-use materials, and replacing print collections with digital surrogates. The resulting savings in physical space are then repurposed for learning commons services and study spaces which more actively support and engage student development needs beyond the academic/cognitive domain to include social, emotional, and applied life skills as well. By providing spaces (virtual and physical) for students to interact with one another, there is the potential for them to engage more actively and collaboratively in using the library's collections, and to be inspired and shaped by that experience.

The transition of collections from print to digital has profoundly affected the ability of libraries to integrate their role and their resources more closely into the campus curriculum, and to target access to those resources in ways that are timely and therefore more effective in supporting student learning. In addition to increasing the library's ability to integrate resources into virtual learning spaces, the print-to-digital revolution has also allowed libraries to free up physical space for the creation of new partnerships between libraries and other units on campus who provide support for student development. Such partnerships might include a wide range of academic or administrative service units supporting generic and specialized student development needs—computing and technology skills, data and GIS services, media creation labs, digital humanities partnerships, and a range of specialized student support services which address generic skill development in writing, learning, or numeracy. Because of their central positioning on most campuses, and their long opening hours, libraries often also house services for first year students, international students, or students with disabilities. These services and partnerships exploit the space once used by print

collections, but can also actively recognize and draw upon the contemporary ways that libraries acquire and serve up information. Deliberate outreach to student wellness and counseling units to select and provide resources (print and digital) which they can refer students to at the point of need will have a much greater impact than if we passively expect students to discover those resources on their own. The success of all of these partnerships and services depend upon access to good quality scholarly information and data, and the library's collections in turn can be selected and made accessible in ways which promote and support their use across the campus, in ways which recognize the full spectrum of student development.

Special and unique local collections in particular provide unique opportunities for students to work with and understand scholarly collections. Primary sources inspire and provide students with historical context for modern ideas and issues, and can be drawn into student learning spaces (virtual or in-person) to catalyze discussion, learning, and intellectual growth. In addition to supporting experiential learning objectives, engaging students in the creation and use of locally digitized content creates learning synergy by combining the practical work of digitization with the intellectual and conceptual aspects of working with collections. By integrating student-created digitized content into the curriculum, students create the learning objects that they and others will use in their studies. Digitization of special collections (whether carried out by students or not) enables the textual and historical analysis of primary sources and the creation of enduring instructional media. Partnerships with faculty and students can be undertaken to set priorities for digitization, and to incorporate digitization projects and the use of digitized or primary artifact collections as part of course design. These and similar projects which involve students as paid employees or volunteers in selecting or managing the library's collections can

engender the development of a number of cognitive, academic and life/workplace skills, including:

- Generic employment skills (technical and interpersonal)

- Knowledge of digitization and curation practices

- Bibliographic and research skills

- Intellectual curiosity and an appreciation of the world's complexity and the variety and range of intellectual viewpoints in it

- Increased understanding of libraries, readership, and scholarly communication

Providing students with the opportunity to work with library collections can also have the side benefit of expanding student's understanding of the cultural roles and skills unique to libraries and librarianship, and how these contribute to the creation and preservation of scholarly knowledge. Through such work, students can move beyond an intellectual exploration of scholarly knowledge to consider such aspects of scholarly communication as:

- Collecting and organizing information as it is created

- Preserving knowledge (even as formats change)

- Making resources discoverable and accessible

- Being aware of emerging information technologies, and how to implement them

- Training others in information (and other) literacies

- Assessing, responding to and advocating for diverse user needs, communities, and preferences

Finally, we can use the public spaces in our libraries (meeting rooms, casual spaces, online and physical exhibition space) to promote and use our collections in ways that will challenge and nurture the intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development of our students. We can "open up" our collections by promoting them through special exhibits, sponsoring events which debate and explore current social issues or "library" values or issues such as censorship or literacy. We can provide spaces for students to curate, display, and celebrate their own intellectual work, so that libraries are seen to be a part of the intellectual life around them. In short, we can reinvent and revalorize the original role of library collections in the life of a university—a place where human thought in all of its richness is gathered together to be preserved, to be shared, and to serve as a catalyst for the discovery of new knowledge for the next generation.

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