



The Valuable Roles of Academic Libraries

Academic libraries contribute in many significant ways to the missions of the colleges and universities of which they are a part. They are active partners in the teaching and research processes and support students and faculty through the provision of information resources and technology, spaces for individual and group work and study, programs and events, and assistance with finding, using, and evaluating information. Their impact is reflected in students' academic success, retention and graduation rates, faculty teaching, grant proposals, research productivity, and the intellectual and social climate within the institution as a whole.

Providers of Information Resources

To support student and faculty research, libraries purchase or license access to scholarly information resources in many formats. Increasingly, these proprietary resources are available electronically, making them accessible to Florida college and university students and faculty at any time and from any location. Most scholarly books, journals and databases are not available freely on the internet but are available by subscription only. Resource sharing and consortial purchasing among the state's higher education institutions make possible the accessibility of a wide range of materials that are otherwise not freely available. The Florida Virtual Campus licenses the use of a core set of databases for the state's public college and universities. Additionally, individual institutions subscribe to or purchase other resources to meet the particular needs of their constituencies. Books not available in one institution often can be borrowed from another college or university, either through interlibrary loan or through the UBorrow program used by the public colleges and universities to borrow materials within the state.

As stewards of intellectual content, many academic libraries are digitizing rare and unique manuscripts, books, and other valuable documents in order to make them available to a wider audience and to preserve them for future generations.

Partners in Teaching and Curriculum

As partners in the teaching and learning process, academic libraries work with faculty to teach students the skills they need to be able to find, use, and evaluate information for particular assignments or courses, skills that will also be valuable in the workforce and for lifelong learning. Professionally trained librarians collaborate with faculty on assignments and assessments and frequently teach information literacy concepts to classes or co-teach a course. Many libraries offer for-credit research classes or specialized workshops on particular topics, software, or research methods. To serve students in the growing number of online programs in the state as well as on-campus students, librarians design tools such as research guides and video tutorials that students can use at the time when they need the information. Increasingly, librarians are embedded in online courses as co-instructors or for just-in-time research assistance within the learning management platform. All of these forms of instruction contribute to students' retention and persistence, as well as their academic success. Additionally, librarians may develop curricula either within their academic unit or through working with discipline faculty to create and implement information literacy lessons, activities, and assessment. Many colleges and universities have adopted information literacy as one of their general education student outcomes, and librarians provide leadership in developing rubrics and other assessments of this important student learning outcome.

Partners in Research

With the explosion of information that's available, sifting through information and finding relevant and reliable sources can be a challenge. Librarians engage with students and faculty on an individual basis or in small groups to provide help with the research process. In some cases, librarians are active participants in research projects or members of teams creating new forms of scholarship using digital tools.

Librarians provide assistance to faculty applying for grant funding by conducting literature reviews and creating data management plans, which are increasingly required by funding agencies. They are also working with faculty to make the products of their research, such as journal articles, reports, and data, as broadly accessible as possible. This can include identifying outlets for publication, assisting with the negotiation of publishing contracts, and providing open access repositories to store articles, data, and other materials.

Builders of Community

While it's often no longer necessary for people to visit the physical library in order to access resources, academic libraries still remain popular places on their campuses. In addition to providing quiet places to work or study, libraries offer spaces for group or collaborative work, practicing presentations, using specialized software or technology, and tutoring or consulting. Many academic libraries serve as hubs for various academic services offered on the campus, a type of academic food court. These services may include advising, writing assistance, tutoring, grants assistance, and professional development workshops. In hosting programs, lectures, book discussions, and other cultural events, academic libraries help to build community and to bring people together to learn in informal ways.

Changes in technology provide both challenges and opportunities as academic libraries work to successfully contribute to their organization's mission. Academic libraries are focused on the needs of students and faculty and provide resources and services that meet these needs. They use data gathered from various sources, including their own assessments, to continually improve the services that they offer and to remain nimble and relevant through constant change.

Academic libraries also play a valuable role within their greater communities. Local high school classes visit them to learn how to do more advanced research in preparation for college. The state's institutions of higher education make the majority of their library collections, both electronic and print, available for members of the community to use on-site. And Florida is a leader in the development of "joint-use" libraries that combine public and academic library services across the college and university sector, which enrich both the local and academic communities.

Making Education More Affordable

As the costs of textbooks continue to rise and have negative effects on student success, academic institutions are turning to Open Educational Resources (OER) as a potential solution. Librarians are demonstrating that they have a meaningful role to play in the implementation of OER on campus. Their expertise in information retrieval, development of electronic curricular materials and negotiating with publishers position them as campus leaders in this movement. They also offer guidance in using library-licensed resources as course materials, which in some cases have been able to completely replace expensive texts or readers.

Enduring Value

Despite many changes brought by technology to the rapidly expanding information universe, the libraries of Florida's colleges and universities endure as valuable assets to their institutions. Students' and faculty members' academic, professional, and personal lives are enriched by the resources and services they provide in an increasingly complex environment. Partners in teaching, learning, and research, academic libraries remain the intellectual and cultural hubs of their institutions while remaining on the cutting edge of new and emerging technologies impacting higher education.