

How Academic Libraries are Distinct from Public Libraries

Prepared by the Academic and Research Libraries Division (ACRLD) Board for MLA
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Funding

- Academic Library funding is carved out of the entire university (or in the case of the Library of Michigan department) budget. Directors and Deans must compete with other worthwhile budget requests.
- Funding for academic libraries comes from tuition, fees and state appropriations. The library cannot increase these revenue sources.
- Increasingly, academic libraries generate a portion of their funding through fundraising.
- Friends of the Library typically donate money without organizing book sales, running a store in the library, mending or other activities.
- The politics of funding is in a different arena.

Accreditation

- Academic institutions are ultimately subject to evaluation by accrediting bodies; in this area, the North Central Association is the primary institutional accrediting body, and many programs (e.g. engineering, business, nursing, to name a few) are also subject to professional certification and accreditation.
- The library must work with its parent institution and with academic departments to insure that the library meets the requirements of the various accrediting bodies.

Research

- Typically academic librarians are required to present and to publish as part of their continued employment. MLA publications, workshops and conference can assist academic librarians with fulfilling these promotion and tenure requirements.
- As academic librarians publish and present, they add to the body of literature and the knowledgebase of the field of librarianship.
- Although not unique to academic librarians, the opportunity to present at conferences and workshops helps academic librarians become more proficient in public speaking which they are often called upon to do in the academic environment.

Liaison

- Academic librarians must remain current in a subject expertise as part of their liaison responsibilities as well as being able to handle general reference responsibilities.
- Academic librarians typically devote a portion of their workweek to working with faculty and meeting their research needs as well as those of their students. We acknowledge that public librarians often work with classroom teachers and homeschoolers, but the academic liaison role is a bit more complex. For example, we often work with faculty to reduce serial subscriptions or to purchase new databases.

Collections

- Academic Libraries have more specialized and expensive collections.
- Preservation and archiving information are primary objectives of academic libraries.
- Academic libraries work together for consortial purchasing of unique content.

Interlibrary Loan

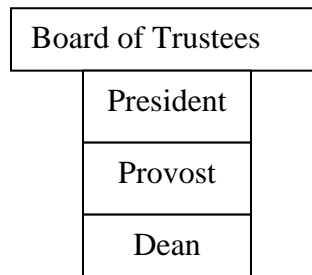
- The Library of Michigan is the lender of last resort for many non-academic libraries.
- Funding cuts to the Library of Michigan affect ILL throughout the state.

Instruction

- Academic librarians perform library and information literacy instruction in “for credit” courses; this may be single visits to classes throughout the curriculum, or may be whole courses offered for credit by the Library itself and taught by academic librarian faculty.
- Staff provides remote service to distance learning student populations.
- Academics help students acquire 21st century skills such as critical thinking/reasoning and information literacy.

Staffing

- Academic libraries offer unique staff positions such as liaisons and associate deans and often require unique skills such as foreign language cataloging and archivists.
- Because of the academic environment, reporting hierarchies differ.



- Due to the pressures of tenure and reappointment, staff are often stressed because of the many demands on their time.

Users

- Our user population changes quickly and each new group of students brings with it different skill sets. We must constantly tweak our instruction and other services to meet these new user populations.
- Community college libraries serve a diverse student population including traditional students, first generation to college, the under prepared and economically disadvantaged, downsized workers and immigrants.
- Academic libraries have a defined primary constituency of students and faculty.
- Academic libraries serve the needs of international students not only in providing research assistance, but in helping them to understand the culture of a country that is not their permanent home.

Communication & Technology

- All of our users have email accounts allowing us to maximize the use of email.
- Academic libraries are often on the cutting edge of technology and suffer the problems of frequent learning curves, and high levels of troubleshooting. I.E. OpenURL, Electronic Resource Management, and institutional repositories.

Academics and MLA – What can MLA offer academic libraries?

- Networking through MLA activities and opportunities.
- Service/training opportunities. We see MLC leading the way more than MLA in this area.
- Academic collegiality within the state.
- Opportunities to publish and present.