

# The University of Lethbridge Library's Contributions to Student Retention & Success: Suggestions & Thoughts for Consideration

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*“The world we live in is  
the world of  
the host system  
we serve,  
and our value is  
manifest in terms of  
our contribution to it.”*

(Rodger, 60)

The University Library  
is about the success of the  
University of Lethbridge.

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# Preface & Methodology

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In keeping with the University of Lethbridge's Strategic Direction B: "Enhancing the Student Experience" from the University of Lethbridge Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, University Librarian, Alison Nussbaumer, in an email dated February 16, 2010, requested a report with "recommendations for specific actions/activities that will link library services and/or collections to student retention – particularly first year" and that would enable the Library to "work towards specific retention linkages and to directly support the university in this important area."

Additional information regarding the focus of the report was taken from a letter from Karen Clearwater, Project Manager, for the Recruitment and Retention Team, to Alison dated April 6, 2010. That letter contained the following goals towards which the University was striving:

- "To identify and implement strategies designed to enhance student retention
- To ensure that system level barriers to student success and engagement are removed
- To provide insights into the student experience at the University of Lethbridge
- To ensure that University of Lethbridge students are given the best experience from first contact through recruitment to graduation and alumni"

In order to provide myself with the necessary background to complete the requested report, did the following:

- ***Literature Review***
  - With an emphasis on more recent literature, searched for and read literature pertaining to the role of the academic library in student retention and success. Since this literature is limited, also read several publications dealing with the topic of student retention in general as well as library related and other literature on subjects that seemed relevant to recommendations being formulated. In total more than 15 monographs and circa 200 or so journal articles, reports and/or web posts were consulted. For the sake of brevity, only those monographs and/or journal articles/web posts that are directly relevant to the recommendations and/or which are fundamental to the topic itself are included in the bibliography.
- ***University Documentation and Website***
  - Reviewed the University's most recent planning documents and other information re strategic direction and initiatives available on the website and/or provided to library staff. Reviewed the website of the University's Recruitment and Retention Integrated Planning (RRIP) initiative. Visited the University website from the point of view of a potential new student and reviewed available information with a view to evaluating what could be learned about the University Library and its services.

From this background gathering exercise the 112 recommendations contained in this report were generated. Many of the recommendations are general. Some of them are probably already Library goals and perhaps underway. None of them are easy or particularly straightforward. All should be considered suggestions and thoughts relevant in one way or another to the topic of student success and the role of the Library in that endeavour.

The report has two parts. The first part is a brief introduction to the topic that attempts to give context. The second part begins with a very brief overview of the role of the library in the academy followed by the report's recommendations and commentary relating to them. This later portion of the report has six broad themes: Mission, the Need for Data, Engagement (both Academic and Social), Environment, Communications & Outreach, and Miscellaneous. Except for the last, miscellaneous, theme each of the others has been identified in the literature as relevant to student retention and success.

My hope is that the report will prove useful in helping the University Library to play its part in assisting all students at the University of Lethbridge to maximize their learning and realize success.

### ***Acknowledgements***

My thanks to Lorelei Woody (nee Harris) whose work on this topic and Power Point presentation, The Role of the Library in Student Retention, started me off.

### ***Retention Caveat***

*"It is one thing to understand why students leave; it is another to know what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed .... Unfortunately, current theories of student leaving are not well-suited to ... [the task of telling] "institutions, at least not directly, what they can do to help ... This is the case for several reasons not the least of which is that current theories of student leaving typically utilize abstractions and variables that are ... often difficult to operationalize and translate into forms of institutional practice ... that significantly enhance student retention over time. This lesson can be broken down into two corollary lessons. First, it is one thing to identify effective action; it is another to implement it fully. Second, it is one thing to begin a program; it is another to see it endure ... many institutions tout the importance of increasing student retention, not enough have taken student retention seriously. Too few are willing to commit needed resources and address the deeper structural issues that ultimately shape student persistence. They are willing to append retention efforts to their ongoing activities, but much less willing to alter those activities in ways that address the deeper roots of student attrition." (Tinto, 2006/7, summary of 6 to 9)*

# Part 1: Introduction & Context

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A multitude of factors influence human society and the institutions, such as universities and their academic libraries, existing within it. Amongst the most influential factors are technology; the shrinking planet and the need to embrace diversity; and increased expectation of accountability for public trusts.

The academic library, long playing the role of custodian and provider to faculty and students of limited intellectual resources in the form of books and scholarly journals articles, has experienced dramatic change. Technology has been a primary driver and there is now a growing body of literature questioning the need for, and continuing existence of, this long time icon of intellectual output and scholarly endeavour.

As a result, the academic library is in the process of re-inventing itself, aligning its mission more closely with that of its parent organization. It is attempting to articulate its many and varied contributions to the enterprise of educating students – contributions that have for so long gone unquestioned.

Each of the three drivers of change influences and has an impact on the issue of student retention and success.

## Technology

Technology has changed everything – information technology in particular.

“Information technology could be considered a game-changer for higher education, since it is providing options never before possible ... the "network" underlies emerging educational models that supersede place – whether that place is a classroom, a building, or a campus. The network provides an architecture for participation and collaboration – irrespective of time, place, age, or position.” (Oblinger, 47)

Its impact and influence on universities and academic libraries has been widely described and documented (Campbell; Housewright, 2009; Oblinger; Tapscott & Williams as examples). It has, and still is, revolutionizing scholarly communication and the process of education itself.

“The key challenge for the whole academic community, including libraries, is how to take advantage of new interactive media while still protecting the integrity of scholarly media.” (Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research , 27)

## Accountability

“Academic librarians, like their colleagues throughout all of higher education, face increased external pressure for accountability ... In higher education, these demands have emerged from a variety of forces ... While at first glance these external pressures may seem overwhelming, in fact they offer higher education administrators an exciting opportunity to engage in rigorous self-examination, an examination

that can lead to the development of a new concept of higher education—one aligned with current stakeholder expectations.” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 26)

The future of the academic library is, of course, intimately connected to the future of the university and in any re-examination of higher education the library too must be re-examined. “New conceptions of the nature of higher education must be accompanied by new conceptions of academic libraries.” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 28)

The expectation of accountability has manifested itself, in part, by the move to performance measures and assessment. In the United States more so than Canada this has been an outcomes based system of assessment. Academic libraries have responded by moving to embrace evidence based practice and an increased focus on assessment.

## Diversity

“Globalization, with its accompanying socioeconomic, demographic, and technological changes, is having a significant impact on America’s workforce and its postsecondary institutions.” (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 1)

“Since the end of World War II ... a college education has developed from the birthright of only the select few to the unspoken ‘right’ of anyone with a high school diploma ...The appearance of these new populations in colleges and universities has affected the subject matter taught, as well as teaching methods and support services.” (Gaither, 1)

“The now diverse student population includes students from different ethnic groups and non-English – speaking backgrounds, international, lower socio-economic backgrounds, mature aged students, students with disabilities, as well as those for whom higher education is the first family experience. Higher education can be an alienating experience for such students ... While discontinuation rates for students from diverse backgrounds can be high, it cannot be assumed that discontinuation occurs because of the students’ lack of ability or motivation.” (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 1-2)

Growth in global consciousness is bringing the world closer together so that its inherent diversity is more difficult to ignore. Not everyone, though, appreciates diversity. It is “a hot-button topic almost everywhere.” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 50)

There is, however, “a growing body of higher education research indicating that diversity makes a positive contribution to the social and intellectual development of all college students.” (Gaither, 59) “When viewed in terms of educational outcomes, an institutional emphasis on “diversity” issues has widespread beneficial effects.” (Astin)

## Human Relationship Factors

In spite of change, certain things about human beings appear not to change.

What struck me during my reading on student retention was the need for students to feel “cared about” and the fact that research indicates that “students tend to be successful at institutions that enhance their ability to feel good about themselves.” (McLaughlin, Brozovsky, & McLaughlin, 15)

What matters to most are the human relations or interaction factors they encounter on campus such as how authentically welcomed, cared for, accepted, and supported they feel; how positive the environment is; and the quality of social interaction they find.

These are enduring values that never go out of style or lose their importance. People like to have their needs met and to be treated with dignity and respect.

“Findings from focus groups show the critical role relationships play in student persistence ... asked what helped them stay in college, students’ answers, almost without exception, are about relationships ... They talk about a specific person, whom they mention by name – a faculty member, an advisor, an administrative support professional – who inspired them to stay. ... sometimes, the connection is with an individual who is not directly related to academics – at one college, for example, several students mentioned a woman who served food in the college cafeteria—supporting the notion that every person working at the community college can play a role in helping students succeed.” (SENSE, 10)

“There is a substantial amount of support that campus climate directly relates to the success or failure of students in postsecondary education. ... Students need to feel that they matter and have a sense of belonging ... If students feel ignored and unaccepted by other students, faculty, or staff, they feel marginalized and are much less likely to persist in college.” (Creighton)

“Whether students feel appreciated, understood, and nurtured is not something that a college or university can necessarily purchase with financial resources. How students view the campus environment may be more a function of institutional culture ... The presence of supportive and affirming campus cultures emerged as a key element in colleges and universities identified by Kuh and his colleagues as institutions that foster student success.” (Pike et al, 866-7)

## ***1.1 Research on Student Retention***

The fundamental question underlying student retention research is: What makes one student successful in attaining graduation and another not?

This question has been extensively studied. It has the typical definitional complications associated with it and a voluminous body of literature attached to it. One thing that is clear, and agreed upon, is that there are no “magic formulas” for retaining students. (Bell, 2008, 1)

A number of factors and characteristics have been identified as contributing (or raising the chances of) student withdrawal. Some relate to the individual student and others relate to the environment/institution. They have been categorized as: psychological, societal, economic, organizational and interactional. (Sarker, 3) Other studies use three categories: Academic, Non-Academic and Other to group variables.



No matter how the factors and characteristics identified by research as influencing retention are categorized, some of them -- such as individual personality traits and socioeconomic factors like low income, minority status, and first generation status (often overlapping) -- are, for the most part, beyond institutional control. Others, however, can be institutionally controlled and institutions are able to work toward helping those students who enrol less academically prepared, and/or with lower levels of motivation, to increase both. (Bradley & Blanco, 1)

Research “points to five conditions that promote student success: institutional commitment, institutional expectations, support, feedback, and involvement or engagement.” (Tinto & Pusser, 6)

It is interesting to note that research has also found that, in general, “institutions were far more likely to attribute attrition to student characteristics than to institutional characteristics.” (Habley et al, 2)

A number of theories have been postulated and models of student departure articulated. The best known is Tinto’s 1975 integrative theory/model. It was later revised in 1987 and 1993. Other theories also exist.

In 2005, Zepke and Leach conducted a best evidence synthesis of the literature on how institutions might improve student outcomes such as retention, persistence and completion. They found two different discourses on the effects of institutional support. “One predominates, centring on what institutions do to fit students into their existing cultures. The other is still emerging and challenges the dominant discourse. Rather than requiring students to fit the existing institutional culture, it suggests that cultures be adapted to better fit the needs of increasingly diverse students.” (Zepke & Leach, 46)

Most of the studies these two authors surveyed showed “that institutional practices influence how successfully students *integrate* both socially and academically.” (Zepke & Leach, 49) “Engage” is often considered synonymous with “integrate” in this context.

Some of the newer theoretical directions now being explored have begun to move from the earlier integrative models such as Tinto’s that result in an assimilation process that fits the student into the institution (ie: “they enrol, learning to do things ‘as they are done around here’ in order to succeed” (Zepke & Leach, 52)) toward a more adaptive process, “where the institutions change to accommodate diverse students. ... there is, as yet less empirical evidence supporting it than supports the assimilative model.” (Zepke & Leach, 47)

Zepke and Leach note that “in this emerging discourse student departure is influenced by their perceptions of how well their cultural attributes are valued, accommodated and how differences between their cultures of origin and immersion are bridged ... Students now expect institutions to fit their lives rather than vice versa ... institutions need to change how they manage the undergraduate experience, to enable students to remain connected to their lives outside the university ... to enhance retention, institutions must change their processes...” (Zepke & Leach, 52-3)

An extensive study of colleges and universities identified as educationally effective is reported in the Kuh et al book, Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter. The two year Documenting

Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project studied 20 four year universities that were high-performers in terms of exceeding expectations re graduation rates and scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) after student and institutional characteristics were taken into account. A team of 24 researchers visited each of these DEEP institution twice for several days. They talked to people on campus; observed classes; and “spent time in libraries, cafeterias, and other campus venues” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Never Let it Rest*, 44 & 46) as well as reviewing various documents. From data gathered they “distilled a handful of common themes that cut across these very different colleges and universities.” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Never Let it Rest*, 46)

Kuh and his colleagues list “an intentional focus on institutional improvement” as one of the most important conditions characterizing DEEP institutions. “They continuously monitor what they're doing, where they are, and where they want to go ... Although generally self critical, they aren't plagued by a culture of complaint ... Supporting this orientation toward improvement is a "can-do" ethic that permeates the campuses ... Indeed, they exude a sense of ‘positive restlessness’ in how they think about themselves and what they aspire to be.” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Never Let it Rest*, 46) Faculty and staff at “DEEP schools are the first to admit that they would like to be even better than they are. Indeed, this drive to improve is one of their more distinctive and endearing characteristics. More than any other trait, it may be the one that leads them to discover even more effective strategies for promoting student success.” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Never Let it Rest*, 51)

## ***1.2 The Academic Library in Student Retention Research***

“Although the presence of an academic library is generally assumed in colleges and universities, the higher education literature rarely includes it in empirical studies ... in the higher education literature, library activities, resources, and services have been intertwined with other institutional activities, resources, and services so that it is challenging to disaggregate the library's contribution.” (Weiner, 4)

This is definitely true with respect to the research conducted on student retention and success.

The academic library, its resources, personnel and services -- if included at all in these studies -- is usually considered an institutional service and/or facility and is included together with “child care, pastoral/religious care, English language support, financial aid, counselling, health service, library support, international students’ assistance, women’s resource centre, student housing and employment services, study skills assistance, student clubs, sports facilities and cafeteria.” (Zepke & Leach, 51)

Research studies examining the relationship between institutional services and/or facilities and student success support the “argument that providing institutional services facilitates positive student outcomes” and that they are a “success factor for students who use them.” (Zepke & Leach, 51) Unfortunately, there is little more differentiation than this in most of these studies. In many of them there is also “a note of caution ... sounded ... acknowledging an often low use of such services.” (Zepke & Leach, 51)

It is clear that the “relationships between expenditure patterns and student engagement [and therefore retention] are complex ... emerging complementary research ... suggest that both financial and moral

support for student-centered policies and programs are necessary for creating campus cultures that promote and sustain effective educational practice. At the very least, why and where an institution invests its resources may make a non-trivial difference in the messages it sends about institutional priorities and values. This, in turn, helps to channel faculty, staff, and student time and energy toward certain activities more than others.” (Pike et al, 868)

There are other mentions of the academic library and/or librarians in the student retention literature. These are integrated throughout the report when appropriate.

### ***1.3 The Academic Library and Student Retention: Library Literature***

The library literature relating to the question of student retention is small but growing.

There is definitely an interest in the role of the academic library in student retention and success. For example, six out of the ten Research Agendas that close the recently commissioned report of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), [The Value of Academic Libraries](#), deal with topics directly related to this one. Two of the five strategic questions from the first section of the ACRL’s [2009 Strategic Thinking Guide for Academic Librarians in the New Economy](#) also exemplify this trend. In addition, one of the “2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries” in the June 2010 edition of [College and Research Library News](#) was: “*Demands for accountability and assessment will increase.* Increasingly, academic libraries are required to demonstrate the value they provide to their clientele and institutions ... to demonstrate the library’s impact on student learning outcomes, student engagement, student recruitment and retention, successful grant applications, and faculty research productivity.” (ACRL, 2010, 287)

Many articles in the library literature expound on the need to determine how academic libraries contribute to the mission of higher education, including student retention, and the need for data to document that contribution; however, unfortunately, assessing the “impacts of academic library services is generally regarded as problematic. While the library is recognised as an integral part of any significant academic institution, it has been very difficult to show empirically and conclusively whether students benefit from their services, or the extent to which student development may be attributed to the library.” (De Jager, 140)

Amongst the research studies on student retention that exist in the library literature, correlation studies predominate. These can be roughly categorized into one of four types that seek to establish a relationship between student retention and (1) library expenditures and/or staffing levels (Emmons & Wilkinson; Mezick); (2) library use (books borrowed) (DeJager; Kramer & Kramer); (3) information literacy instruction (Corlett; Wang; Whitmire, 1998; Wong & Comor; Zhong & Alexander) and (4) library employment (Wilder, 1990; Rushing & Poole, 2002).

Other studies also exist. There are a number of studies for instance that attempt to document the impact of information literacy instruction on students. Even though “Library instructional efforts are thought to impact student retention ... more research is needed in this area” (ACRL, 2010, Values, 34).

That body of literature is voluminous and, for the most part, been considered beyond the scope of this report.

There is also a small body of library literature that discusses the topic of student retention but does not report on research. This has been cited as relevant.

## Part 2: Role of the Academic Library & Report Recommendations:

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Libraries are a means or “mechanism for making knowledge available in communities or organizations.” (Lewis, 419) and it “is hard to imagine a college without a library ...The library is the physical manifestation of the core values and activities of academic life.” (Kuh & Gonyea)

As such, the University Library is in a position to add value to the student education/experience. It must strive to maximize the benefits it brings to campus.

Three primary roles have been identified for the academic library (Nitecki,48). They are:

### **Role 1: Scholarly Materials**

Accumulator and preserver of knowledge resources (books, equipment, and other information carriers); collection building; acquiring, organizing and preserving information resources; buyer & archives

### **Role 2: Services**

Service provider (for retrieving information and borrowing materials, instruction, and other customer assistance for accessing knowledge) for accessing information; information consulting; on providing guidance to locate and access information to meet their individual requirements; gateway

### **Role 3: Space for Self Study or Student Gatherings**

Facilitator (through design of environments and nurturing of relationships that foster self-directed learning and creation of new knowledge) of intentional learning and knowledge creation among its visitors; knowledge transformation; building on partnerships to maximize the institution’s ability to create and share knowledge in the service of research, teaching and intellectual growth; teaching, research, and learning support

Bell suggests the service role – “the delivery of individual research assistance and personal attention” should be emphasized “as a core contributor to student success”. (Bell, 2008, 2)

## 2.1 Mission

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In their book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, Kuh et al make the statement: “Student success starts with an institutional mission that espouses the importance of talent development and then enacts this vision.” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Student Success in College*, 266) It is the first of their eight “Tried and True” principles.

In this section of their book, they make it clear that: “The power of a clear, coherent mission” is an idea that has been “around so long”, and is “so widely accepted”, that it has become an article of faith and therefore may be easily dismissed. (Kuh et al, *Student Success in College*, 2005, 266)

They then go on to write: “Occasionally, trite, well-worn phrases capture truisms, Such is the case for cultivating a *shared vision* of what is desirable and possible in terms of student development, persistence, and satisfaction ... all schools have a mission – whether it is clearly and widely understood or not. A ‘living mission,’ however, may or may not be what the institution writes or says about itself. It is what happens when a college delivers the curriculum, organizes human talent, and allocates resources in a manner that enables it to realize its aspirations ... living missions are not mandated or legislated. They represent what people do on a daily basis.” (Kuh et al, 2005, *Student Success in College*, 266 -7)

Even though these principles are for institutions of higher learning as a whole they are also relevant to their individual parts, including the library.

Scott Bennett in his 2009 article on “Libraries and Learning: A History of Paradigm Change 1” advocates that “librarians cease to think of their mission as primarily one of supporting the academic work of others and, instead, come to see themselves primarily as educators, accepting the very considerable challenge – amounting to a paradigm change in the profession – of joining with student and faculty as collaborators in enacting the learning missions of our institutions.” (Bennett, 194-5)

At a minimum, the Library’s mission needs to express its commitment to institutional priorities such as retention and student success. Without a clear mandate to put such goals at the core of any Library undertaking, the necessary focus on students is too easily lost.

### **RECOMMENDATION:1**

*Embed in any vision and/or mission statement created for the University Library the idea that student success will be an important and fundamental objective of all Library undertakings or activities.*

Without this focus, many of the other recommendations to bolster the Library’s role in enhancing student retention and experience cannot be achieved and/or are too easily “glossed over” without the sort of fundamental reflection and attitudinal change required to achieve them.

### **RECOMMENDATION:2**

*Consider utilizing “Mission Monitoring” as a tool to affirm that the Library’s activities and services are consistent with its stated mission. (ACRL, 2010, *Values*, 62)*

## 2.2 The Need for Data

One statement in the second fundamental principle of the University of Lethbridge Strategic Plan 2009-2013 is: “We conduct ourselves on the basis of informed, evidence-based practice.”

This would suggest that there is a need to adopt a research and development culture on the campus, including the Library, that embraces an experimental and assessment oriented approach to encourage staff to stay current and to bring new ideas into their workplace.

One of the foundations of a successful retention program is “accurate and comprehensive information about students, their needs, and the factors that affect retention.” (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 4)

“Designing and implementing retention strategies is not a process with a clear beginning and a clear end. It is a complex and continuous process that involves analysis, implementation, and assessment. And assessment, in turn, leads to new strategies, implementation, and further assessment. While it is not possible to achieve perfection (if such a condition exists) in student retention, progression, and completion, it is always possible to improve.” (Habley & McClanahan, 25)

The point of assessment activities is to improve. Knowing what is informs “efforts to change what is.” (Keeling et al, 28) It promotes transparency and demonstrates accountability.

One of the characteristics of DEEP institutions is decision making informed by data.

“DEEP schools frequently combine stories with systematically collected information about student and institutional performance to estimate how well they're doing.” Data drives most of the things they do and most “use some form of benchmarking and were among the early adopters of NSSE, using it in combination with other assessment tools to determine whether some aspects of student and faculty behavior could be better aligned.” (Kuh et al, 2005, 47)

Although this quotation, like the one relating to mission, is directed to institutions of higher learning in general, its message is equally applicable to the academic libraries that serve them.

### ***2.2.1 Creating a Culture of Assessment and a Library Assessment Plan***

“The measurement of the actual use and value of library services to the campus community ... may offer invaluable insight about how the library can best evolve services to serve its constituents. It is of fundamental importance that all current and potential library roles, with no sacred cows excepted, be evaluated proactively and regularly and not just in response to a crisis, in order to see changes over time, identify problems in unexpected places, and appropriately and proactively evaluate potential roles. Additionally, it is essential that intelligence gathered in this process be seriously considered and used to prompt and guide decisions, rather than being explained away or simply ignored when it does

not support an accepted belief or desired conclusion. Some have described this as a ‘culture of assessment,’ emphasizing the need for cultural change to integrate evaluation pervasively throughout the library and into decision-making.” (Housewright, 264)

“Build a culture of evidence. Good education is driven by passion, but it must be firmly rooted in evidence ... build a culture of evidence — one in which administrators, faculty, and staff use data to set goals, monitor progress, and improve practice. Individuals operating in a culture of evidence embrace data and share it widely because they know transparency builds credibility, ownership, and support for change.” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 20)

### **RECOMMENDATION:3**

*That the University Library actively strive to create a culture of assessment/evidence in order to learn about the communities it serves (including those students who might not persist without additional support) and to evaluate how well the Library supports those communities and the goals of the institution.*

### **RECOMMENDATION:4**

*Use the understanding gained from the assessment process in an iterative manner to improve programs and services and increase the Library’s responsiveness to the needs of the communities it serves.*

In a 1998 article entitled “Using Assessment Criteria to Determine Library Quality” Ronald Dow describes the process of a research library (University of Rochester, River Campus) creating “an assessment environment in an effort to focus on educational impact” (Dow, 277) by adopting “aspects of assessment as an alternative to traditional resource-based input and output measures.” (Dow, 280)

This article describes the initial year or so – 1996/7 – of this change in orientation. Circa seven years later from 2004 to 2006, it was a team of University of Rochester Library staff that pioneered the use of ethnographic methods to study undergraduate students on their campus and their use of the Library. That research has made their institution famous – at least in the library world.

### **RECOMMENDATION:5**

*Read the Dow article for its description of the earliest efforts of a specific academic library to create a culture of assessment, for ideas re how to motivate staff to adopt a more assessment oriented frame of mind, and for an outline of a means to initiate action on an assessment agenda.*

The ARL has a 1.5 day site visit and follow-up report program that focuses on evaluating assessment efforts at participating libraries and recommending ways for them to move forward on assessment.

### **RECOMMENDATION:6**

*Utilize the ARL “Making Library Assessment Work: Practical Approaches to Developing and Sustaining Effective Assessment” program to “jump-start” an assessment program.*



### 2.2.1.1 Staff Development

“The ultimate determinant to successfully employing both technology and expertise is to engage in library-wide discussion of why certain data is needed and what questions can or should be addressed through the gathering of data.” (Brown, 404)

The most important step in creating a culture of assessment is to start. Although, for the most part, libraries and “librarians have little experience with data analysis and use, and we are not always sure whether the data we collect is what we really need ... Until we change the culture and value assessment, librarians will not be successful in meeting our institutional needs. We also will not create the agility and flexibility necessary to stay relevant to changing campus needs.” (Stoffle et al, 368)

“Not engaging in assessment is not a good option.” (ACRL, 2010, Values, 31) Have those discussions to determine what is of local interest and then engage in small-scale, practical, less arduous assessment. Certainly there is a need for rigorous research about libraries; however, “small-scale local studies are often more powerful within individual institutions ... start by identifying one area of impact, collecting data, analyzing the data, and reporting results, even if the results are not ideal”. (ACRL, 2010, Values, 94)

The need for perfection gets in the way of practicality and moving forward. The focus should be on producing meaningful, practical, results that help with decision making and not necessarily on producing a masterpiece of research worthy of publication. The literature on student retention has been cited as having the fault of being less than practical (Tinto, 6) and cases in the library world also exist. (Woodward, 139)

To provide the Library’s staff with training in measurement, evaluation, and assessment in order to carry out small scale local projects, it would be beneficial to consider utilizing two starting points for this process that were gleaned from a September 24, 2008 Power Point presentation by Rosalind Dudden. It was the fourth part of a series of webinars entitled, “Using Evaluation Results to Communicate Your Value.”

The first is a recommendation for the book, The Tell It! Manual: The Complete Program for Evaluating Library Performance, that goes over basic evaluation techniques and outlines a course of study. The second is a referral to a University of Maryland Libraries website at <http://www.lib.umd.edu/groups/learning/learningcurriculum.html> that provides a comprehensive learning curriculum that serves as an example of the types of skills that should be mastered. It is a plan “for all library staff to develop the skills needed to become members of teams and to improve the way we operate as an organization.” Component III of that curriculum deals with Measurement, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement for Planning and Decision-Making. (Dudden, slide 39)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:7**

*That an ongoing and training support system be provided for Library staff in order to better equip them to undertake assessment activities.*

**RECOMMENDATION:8**

*Reward Library staff for an assessment/"studying your students" attitude and orientation and for any useful assessments they may undertake.*

There are many, spin-off, benefits to be gained by adopting an assessment oriented approach. One of the most important from the Rochester studies was as follows: "This study, from the methods used to the results, has motivated library staff. Many of us experienced a subtle but important shift in how we think about and approach our work. We've been stimulated and invigorated by becoming attentive observers and seeing students with a researcher's eyes ... the changes that came about were not from any official administrative initiative but from individual librarians experimenting with new ideas. ... trying new things." (Marshall, Burns & Briden, 29)

### 2.2.1.2 Focus on Utilization Rates for Services

Project Information Literacy (PIL) is an ongoing research study based in the University of Washington's Information School. It seeks "to understand how college students find information and conduct research—their needs, strategies, and workarounds—for their course work and for addressing issues that arise in their everyday lives." (Head and Eisenberg, 2009, 2)

One of the major findings to date is that students tend not to use librarians, especially in later years of study. Most students used library resources (databases in particular as the result of orientations by librarians in their initial years of study), but not library services.

One of the recommendations in the initial PIL report was that "Librarians should systematically (not just anecdotally) examine the services they provide to students. This may require looking at things through a new lens, if need be. Questions should be addressed about *how and why services and resources are used*—not only *how often* (e.g., circulation or reference desk statistics). Librarians may want to initiate their analysis by asking what percentage of their campus are using the library, for what particular resources or services, and why or why not? At the same time, we recommend librarians seriously question whether they are developing a set of "niche services," which only reach a small percentage of students." (Head and Eisenberg, 2009, 35)

There is a definite need to know who is and is not using the services available. Other studies have determined that "when we look more carefully at who is using our individual services, we find that a disproportionate number are either in the top quartile or the bottom quartile of their class as measured by college GPA." (Holmgren, 186)

"No private sector corporation would survive on the basis of failing to invest in consumer profiling, market research and loyalty programmes. No library we are aware of has a department devoted to the evaluation of the user, how can that be?" (CIBER, 34)

"Libraries ... would be well served to engage in local intelligence-gathering to better understand how their faculty, students and administrators use and perceive the library and its services. Information

gleaned in this process may suggest otherwise unconsidered changes which could greatly improve user satisfaction, identify initiatives which are liable to be particularly controversial and more. Regular analysis of the needs of one's constituency is an essential tool in effectively serving a diverse population." (Housewright & Schonfeld, page 30)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:9**

*In the context of the University of Lethbridge, utilize assessment to answer the questions, and explore the issues on library utilization, raised in the above quotations.*

### **2.2.1.3 Focus on Instructional Impact Assessment**

"Unfortunately, we know relatively little about what and how students academic library experiences contribute to desired outcomes of college (including information literacy) or about the nature of the relationships between library use and college experiences that research studies show directly affect student learning, such as student-faculty interaction, writing activities, and so forth." (Kuh & Gonyea)

In the 2009 paper entitled, "The Future of Information Literacy in Academic Libraries: A Delphi Study" the thoughts of 13 information literacy experts re the future of information literacy are summarized. One concern of the group was assessment. "Participants stressed the importance of assessment, both for fully participating as partners in instruction and for legitimizing information literacy programs. Experts maintained that, if librarians could demonstrate gains in student learning and improved knowledge as a direct outcome of their instruction, they would be better able to justify their programs and open a dialogue with faculty ... As one expert noted, local results are likely to be more persuasive in convincing faculty of the effectiveness of information literacy instruction." (Saunders, 107)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:10**

*That the University Library's current instruction program be more rigorously assessed and that evaluation of this program be an active and ongoing.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:11**

*That for any new instructional ventures (ie: involvement in the First Year Experience or Foundation Program as an example) assessment be considered a critical component.*

"Assessment creates opportunities for dialogue and encourages educators to develop a broader, more inclusive understanding of the complex nature of their institutions and a better understanding of their respective contributions." (Banta, 46)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:12**

*Utilize assessment of local, library instruction, activities to foster collaboration with faculty and expand opportunities for additional information literacy instruction.*

### 2.2.1.4 ACRL Values Research Agendas & Other Starting Points

In the recently published The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report sponsored by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) one of the ten Research Agendas included deals specifically with Student Retention and Graduation. As well, there are at least five others that could be considered in some way relevant to the issue of student retention. Each agenda “lists an essential question, surrogates (also known as hallmarks or indicators) for library impact ... data sources, and potential correlations” (ACRL, 2010, Values, 102) and would be useful starting points for local discussion.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:13**

*Utilize these Research Agendas to explore potential ways to measure, articulate and document the value of the University Library including its contributions to student retention.*

In the Appendices of Dugan, Hernon and Nitecki’s book, Viewing Library Metrics from Different Perspectives, there are a number of useful charts that give metrics. Some relate directly to student engagement and retention.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:14**

*That these appendices be reviewed in order to glean metrics of potential use to the University Library with respect to documenting its contributions to student retention and success.*

### 2.2.1.5 Other Thoughts re Assessment Initiatives

What follows is an assortment of other thoughts about potential assessment projects and/or strategies that would yield useful data relevant to the issue of the University Library’s contribution to student retention and success at the University of Lethbridge.

#### ***Assessment Management Systems***

“Assessment management systems (AMSs) exist to help academic faculty, student affairs professionals, and librarians design, document, and report assessments. AMSs not only track what assessments reveal about student learning, but also about ... what assessors have learned. ... AMSs are typically organized around a tree structure based first on organizational units (programs, departments, schools, or the entire institution), then on the goals and/or outcomes of those units. In an AMS, goals and outcomes can cover learning as well as other strategic areas ... For librarians, AMSs organize assessment data in ways that facilitate documentation, action, and reporting. For example, many librarians assess student learning using informal methods ... Without an AMS, such assessment findings are viewed only by individual librarians, then maintained in files inaccessible to others or discarded. As a result, much assessment-based librarian learning becomes tacit knowledge, which is difficult to surface and share on an organizational level. ... AMSs enable librarians to share existing assessment data ‘so that others can

benefit from what individuals have learned’ and transform their libraries into learning organizations.” (Oakleaf, 36)

Assessment Management Systems of various sorts have been used in school libraries “to document and analyze assessment results” (ACRL, 2010, [Values](#), 70) in order to better manage data and “make assessment ‘easier, faster, less intrusive, more useful, and cost effective’”. (ACRL, 2010, [Values](#), 45)

Some academic libraries have begun to experiment with them as well (Bell, Action Analytics, 2010) and several commercial products are available. Because they are systems often used in the United States in conjunction with learning outcomes, their usefulness in the Canadian context may be somewhat more limited.

### **RECOMMENDATION:15**

*Explore the benefits that acquiring an assessment management system would have for the University of Lethbridge Library in terms of recording, analyzing and documenting the impacts of its library instruction program on student learning and success.*

### ***Graduate Students***

The issue of retention is not limited to undergraduates alone. It is also a major concern in graduate studies (Fleming-May; Kenney) and warrants additional, more focused attention.

“One of the more well-kept secrets of academe is its high rate of attrition, which, according to several studies, hovers somewhere between 40 and 50 percent. Surprisingly, lack of academic ability is not the cause of most students’ leaving doctoral programs prior to completion; studies have shown that there is little difference in qualifications between those who complete the doctorate and those who do not. Most researchers who study doctoral attrition attribute it to a combination of factors.” (Fleming-May, 204)

Although graduate studies was not the primary focus of this report, some literature relevant to the topic of graduate student retention was consulted and Rumi Graham’s [Graduate Student Services, University of Lethbridge Library: Report](#) read.

Many of the concerns with respect to undergraduates and use of library services (or lack thereof) are common to both student populations; and hence, some of the recommendations in this report may be relevant to graduate as well as undergraduate students.

### **RECOMMENDATION:16**

*That the issue of graduate student retention at the University of Lethbridge be investigated further.*

### ***Measuring Value***

“More successful libraries, in addition to being concerned with effectiveness and efficiency of service, questioned and measured the value their services contributed to their parent institution. These libraries utilized a variety of different strategies to come up with more meaningful value metrics. For example, some libraries measured the savings the library offered ... including the time saved through the use ... [and] enabled them to present ... a dollar value of library services ... Although the efficacy or accuracy of different measurements maybe debated, in general, simply choosing to measure value and to adopt a value-oriented mindset lays the groundwork for ... library success. Effectively measuring the value of services depends deeply on engagement with the user community, since value is intrinsically tied up in the needs of the user. Successful libraries regularly and deeply engage with their user communities to ensure that they are aware of the changing work habits and needs of their constituents.” (Housewright, 257-8)

Students value time and meeting the needs of their courses in terms of assignments. The findings of PIL and other studies confirm their pragmatic approach.

Other academic libraries have asked their users what they valued, as opposed to what they wanted, needed, rated as satisfactory, etc. and they received answers “which were surprisingly different to what we had learnt through quality approaches. A holistic academic vision of the library as the physical expression of knowledge emerged ... This had not been identified through our satisfaction surveys, which separate content, service and physical dimensions. The student vision also revealed a new set of priorities, much more closely linked with day-to-day pressures and contextual experiences, and suggesting a need for much closer involvement of this group in design and delivery of service.” (Town, 81)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:17**

*Explore assessment activities that are “values” based.*

### ***Monitoring the Literature and Studies about Students***

Many publications describe characteristics associated with a particular age group or demographic and/or the results of studies on the student population in higher education. Both have the potential to be useful in understanding and learning more about the student population at the University of Lethbridge.

The PIL studies and the Slipigni Connaway & Dickey report, “The Digital Information Seeker: Report of findings from selected OCLC, RIN and JISC user behavior projects”, are examples.

Have these descriptions been compared to local student data? If the stereotype of the Net Gen student is applicable to many University of Lethbridge students then it would be useful to consider whether or not current library services are directed at them and meeting their needs.

**RECOMMENDATION:18**

*Assign the responsibility of monitoring the literature vis-à-vis research on students to a Library staff member with a view to having them suggest potential avenues of relevant assessment that could be undertaken to answer questions such as those posed in this report.*

***National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)***

The NSSE elicits information on student engagement focussing on “the extent to which students engage in good educational practices ... [and it] measures student behaviors that are highly correlated with many desirable learning and personal development outcomes of college.” (Gratch-Lindauer, 2008, 102) Although not a direct measure of student retention, student engagement and the NSSE are considered meaningful surrogates.

The NSSE has been linked to information literacy standards and the ACRL has been working with the NSSE to have questions relating to information literacy included in the survey. Information literacy “behaviors are significantly related to other NSSE measures of student engagement, which is related to retention, although NSSE does not directly capture any retention data.” (Gratch Lindauer, 2007)

A body of literature exists that considers how to utilize this survey to gain “‘a snapshot of information literacy at the institutional level’ ... or as individual questions which can be combined with individual student records data” to give insight into particular sub-populations within the student body. (ACRL, 2010, Values, 35)

The University of Lethbridge participates in this survey once every three years. A Power Point presentation of the 2007 results is available online. The next survey is scheduled for the spring of 2011. On each campus that participates in the NSSE there is an opportunity to add local items. If deemed important it would be possible to add a question or two about how the University Library contributes to a more engaged student and its importance to student success.

**RECOMMENDATION:19**

*Work with Institutional Analysis to mine the existing NSSE data for information regarding the student satisfaction with, and commentary on, the University Library.*

**RECOMMENDATION:20**

*Explore ways in which current NSSE data can be used to advocate for more and better integrated information literacy instruction/activity.*

**RECOMMENDATION:21**

*Become familiar with and follow the progress of the ACRL/NSSE initiative with a view to utilizing relevant data when and if information literacy related questions are routinely included on the NSSE.*

“Perhaps the most important advice to remember regarding student engagement surveys is that ‘there is a distinction between participating in NSSE and using NSSE. In the end, what good is it if all you get is a

report?' ... The goal is to gain insight into the relationship between engagement and library outcomes ... and to translate that insight into action." (ACRL, 2010, Values, 37)

### **Non Users**

Oregon State University, via survey research, learned that approximately 29% of their students did not use either the physical or virtual library. In follow up focus groups with non or infrequent users they learned "that students seek comfort, convenience, and quiet in extra-library and library environments; rely on knowledgeable individuals for research assistance; and conduct the majority of their research online from home." (Vondracek, 277)

The authors wanted "to challenge the existing assumptions about why students do not use academic libraries and to find evidence that could be used to support or refute these assumptions. We found that the answer might be as simple as undergraduates are more comfortable at home or that their curriculum does not require use of library resources." (Vondracek, 278)

Other reports like the "recent OCLC report, College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources, indicates that most undergraduates either do not visit their campus library or do so only one or two times per year." (ACRL, 2006) It did not however try and ascertain why this might be.

The recent Information Technology power point presentation on the findings of a survey at the University of Lethbridge indicates various use statistics for library services. It does not, however, appear to be possible (at least from the Power Point) to determine how many of those surveyed never use any of the Library's services or collections at all. This would be useful to know.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:22**

*Explore the reasons for non-use of the University Library with a view to determining if there are concerns that deter use and, if so, if there is something that can be done to address them.*

### **Observation Studies**

Simple observation of students (ie: watching what they do) may yield more useful information than surveying or asking them what they want. (Lewis, 431; Bell, 2009, 53)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:23**

*Sensitize staff to this understanding and reward them for initiatives that result in better understanding of student behavior in the University Library and suggestions for improved service.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:24**

*Consider whether or not the Library may be making "Milkshake Mistakes" as outlined in the July 12, 2010 posting by the Unquiet Librarian at <http://theunquietlibrarian.wordpress.com/2010/07/12/is-your-library-making-milkshake-mistakes/>*



### ***Other Surveys and Survey Data***

The University participates in surveys other than the NSSE that may or may not contain relevant information re the Library.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:25**

*Work with Institutional Analysis to review the types of information that can be gleaned from other surveys that the University regularly participates in and extract any data that is relevant to the Library.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:26**

*Consider utilizing The Ultimate Question Survey that asks the question: “Would you recommend us to a friend?” and its supplemental question: “If not, why not?” to calculate a Net Promoter Score. (Storey, 2006)*

### ***Qualitative Versus Quantitative Data***

“Documenting the contribution of the library calls for qualitative data in that quantitative metrics cannot explain that contribution ... [and they] do not tell the entire story.” (Dugan, Herson, & Nitecki, 124)

Quantitative investigations give rise to stories and stories are useful for documenting contributions as well as for promotion and marketing which is covered later in the Communications section of the report.

Quoting Peter Frederick’s book Essays on Teaching Excellence: Toward the Best in the Academy, the authors of Viewing Library Metrics from Different Perspectives note: “Various stakeholders rely on graduation rate, as well as retention rate ... ‘The use and power of stories is consistent with the growing body of literature on the role of emotions in learning and its inextricable connection with the intellect.’ Stories therefore become a way ‘to make connections to larger themes and patterns.’ (Dugan, Herson, & Nitecki , 124)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:27**

*Explore qualitative, as well as quantitative, means to document the Library’s contributions to the campus.*

### ***Rochester Methods***

The University of Rochester pioneered the use of ethnographic methods to study their students’ use of library facilities and services. Other libraries are now doing the same and, as a result, are able to provide their campuses with useful insights into student behaviour. As noted elsewhere, this initiative is a potential collaborative project with the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology.

**RECOMMENDATION:28**

*Study the student population utilizing methods pioneered at the University of Rochester in order to better understand University of Lethbridge student needs and behaviours.*

***User Comments and Suggestions***

User comments can be a useful source of insight into how students and others experience the programs, services and offerings of the University Library. Comments can originate from both formal and informal sources (ex. the Meliorist, questionnaires and student surveys conducted by the University, LibQUAL+, etc.). Any and all comments and suggestions should be welcomed and considered in light of what can be learned from them.

**RECOMMENDATION:29**

*That a system for obtaining, coding, analyzing and tracking user comments, and suggestions vis-à-vis the Library be developed and maintained; that comments be systematically reviewed on an ongoing basis; and, that any issues arising from those comments on a frequent and consistent basis, be addressed.*

**RECOMMENDATION:30**

*Explore the applicability of a web based application to assist with the process of comment tracking and review. (Catone)*

**2.2.2 Retention Related Questions to Explore**

In creating this report, the following questions related to retention at the University of Lethbridge, occurred to me. They are presented in no particular order and some may be duplicates of other questions posed elsewhere in the report. It would be interesting to know the answers or, if none are available, to explore any data relating to them. All would yield useful information for the evaluation and/or planning of Library services.

- Are the retention rates at the three campus locations the same? If not, how do they differ?
- What are the University of Lethbridge retention rates for graduate students?
- Are some attrition rates higher amongst certain disciplines or types of students? If so, what service/assistance is aimed at this particular group?
- How does the graduation/retention rate for First Nations students compare to the overall graduation rate? “When an institution has an overall graduation rate of 75 percent but only 15 percent of its Native American students graduate, the success of the majority masks problems in specific populations.” (Bean, 402) Attrition rates for Native Americans in the United States is the highest for any minority group (Creighton).
- What percentage of the student population at the U of L never uses the Library (physical and/or virtual)? If not, why not?

- How does the graduation/retention rate of student workers in the Library compare to the overall rates?
- What are the graduation/retention rates for students who have taken Library Science 2000 and how do they compare with the overall average?
- How does the Library use rate of those who graduate compare with those who do not graduate? Is there a difference between physical and virtual use?
- Who are the Library's current users? What do they use the Library for? What use do they make of its facilities, technology, staff or collections?
- What alternatives do students use instead of the Library and why?

## 2.3 Student Engagement

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The literature makes it clear that students are better retained and are more successful in an environment that engages and sustains them while, at the same time, challenging them. “Student engagement is important because research shows that it's linked to a host of desirable outcomes of college.” (Kuh et al, 2005, 44)

“Both the academic and social dimensions of engagement are implicated in student retention. Students need to engage and identify on a personal level with their university, and opportunities to develop friendships and networks, with their fellow students assist in this process. Academically, active and interactive learning can assist students to develop networks, and also to engage with their subjects so that they are interested and study for meaning and understanding, rather than merely to remember enough information to pass their assessments.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 167)

Key to many of the retention strategies present in the literature are means to further student engagement both academically and socially. Many of the academic strategies involve pedagogy that also strengthens the social involvement of students especially for those that are new to the institution.

As noted earlier, one of the chief drivers of change in higher education has been the increased diversity in the student body. Some students require assistance to adapt and become acclimatized to the requirements of university; however, the “changes stimulated or necessitated by a particular group of students benefit all students, and thus have a positive impact on the achievement and retention of the whole cohort.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 182) “A variety of diversity initiatives have been undertaken on college campuses that focus both on practices and programs that specifically address access, retention, and academic success of historically under-represented students. The research on these initiatives suggests that institutions that are truly prepared to educate a diverse population of students are also providing all students the skills and experiences necessary for an increasingly complex and pluralistic society ... actions designed to improve learning for minority students tend to improve learning for all students.” (Gaither, 59)

In addition, student retention and success efforts cannot be limited to only the first year of study. “It is necessary that retention interventions be sustained throughout a student’s enrollment and be systematically applied to all facets of the student experience.” (Habley & McClanahan, 24)

So what can the academic library and its staff contribute to engagement? The following two subsections address this question, first with respect to the academic, and then the social, dimensions of engagement.

### ***2.3.1 The Library’s Role in Academic Engagement***

One of the key findings of the study of DEEP institutions was that they “create clear pathways to engagement to help students more easily find their way to educational resources and become involved

in educationally purposeful activities. In this regard, these institutions do two things very well to channel student time and energy toward effective educational activities. First, they teach students early on how to take advantage of institutional resources for their learning. Second, they make available to students *what* they need *when* they need it.

With regard to the former, these institutions combine intentionally crafted policies and practices to teach students long before they arrive on campus, what they can expect from librarians, faculty, staff, and other students and what they themselves need to do to thrive. They arrange for students to participate in events and activities upon matriculation to help them effectively navigate their new environment and make meaning of their experience.” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 19-20)

They also minimize library anxiety. Some “*require* certain students to participate in activities, such as summer advising and orientation, as well as substantive fall welcome week events ... To overcome and counteract these preconceptions [anxiety and fear re the library], it is important for librarians to reach out to put students at ease. Involvement in classroom instruction gives librarians visibility and helps them connect to students. Many librarians know a good deal about how students spend their research time, yet they are an underused educational resource. DEEP colleges take advantage of librarians’ experience and promote student success. Academic librarians, along with student affairs staff, support staff, and classroom faculty work together to limit the number of students who might fall through the cracks.” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 20)

Key to engagement therefore, particularly in the first year, is “how a school deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. (ie: persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation.)” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 18) At DEEP schools students are introduced to librarians early on so that they can call upon them “as both sources of academic support and information they can draw upon during the course of their studies.” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 20)

“Students who learn the most information literacy skills come from institutions that communicate the importance of information literacy.” (Kuh, 2008) DEEP institutions have adopted “effective ways to teach information literacy skills systematically to large numbers of students early in their college careers” by including “librarians on the instructional team for first-year seminars.” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 21)

All of these initiatives help foster increased opportunities for out-of-class interactions between students and library staff. “Research shows that frequent, informal contact with both classroom faculty and other university support staff contributes to college success and to intellectual and emotional development in general ... Librarians can help students adjust to college life by orienting them to the library and library resources or just from personal contacts and close cooperation with classroom faculty members. Also, some evidence suggests that the library experiences of undergraduates are positively related to ‘select educationally purposeful activities, such as using computing and information technology and interacting with faculty members’ ... Spending time with students – in the classroom or

at the reference desk – is essential in order to understand how student find, retrieve, and use information for their course and research needs ... These experiences are indispensable for selecting appropriate approaches to teaching information literacy.” (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 22)

Information literacy is an area of intense interest to librarians at all levels including the national and international levels. This is particularly true in the United States because several of their accreditation bodies have recognized it in their standards as a necessary competency for students to acquire.

Information literacy is not, however, a simple concept.

“Information literacy is a concept deeply embedded in and related to a wide variety of education concepts, such as learning and information processing, critical thinking, presentation and writing skills, and computer literacy. Advocates of information literacy should acknowledge this embeddedness and not try to appropriate all related fields to create a grand, all-encompassing definition ... Instead, they should explore these relationships and plan for developing those skills and attitudes in students in collaboration with a variety of institutional stakeholders. Put another way, exploration of the definition of information literacy should not be a surrogate for the territorial battle over responsibility for teaching information literacy. The development of the definition should be an exercise of articulating educational goals in the broad context of general education.” (Kirk, 8)

At most institutions information literacy is not taught systematically. Instead, it is offered “in an ad hoc manner” (Saunders, 100) with faculty involvement varying greatly within the same institution or even the same department.

Accepting information literacy as an important outcome for a university graduate, agreeing to how it should be taught and by whom, and even defining what information literacy is and what it entails are all complex and controversial issues. As noted earlier, there is a voluminous body of literature exploring information literacy that this report does not cover. It is assumed that the state of affairs with respect to information literacy education at the University of Lethbridge will be dealt with separately. For the purposes of this report, however, it has been assumed that it is an important topic relating to the issue of student retention and that the Library has a significant role to play in having students acquire it.

What follows are brief overviews of three topics – Undergraduate Research Skills, Graduate Student Literature Reviewing Skills, and Complicating/Limiting Factors for the University Library – all relevant to the issue of academic engagement, information literacy, and the Library’s role in both. Following that the ten educational practices deemed to have high impact in increasing student retention are discussed with an emphasis on the potential role of the Library in each.

### **2.3.1.1 Undergraduate Student Research Skills**

There have been a number of recent studies that explore the information seeking habits and research skills of students (CIBER, ERIAL, OCLC, PIL) and at least one review article that summarizes the findings of many of them (Slipigni Connaway & Dickey). PIL is particularly relevant and many of the results and recommendations in their reports mirror those in other publications.

All of these studies raise serious concerns about the understanding students bring to the research process, at least in a traditional sense, and the nature and rigor of the academic work required of them. Citing Burton and Chadwick, Laskowski notes the potential in the current situation to both devalue and place “at risk a central assumption of academic writing: that a writer will support claims with appropriate, valid, and authoritative evidence.” (Laskowski, 308)

For the purposes of this report a brief summary of the major findings of such studies grouped and presented under six themes – Pragmatism, Favourite Sources, Overload, Coaching, Gambling, and Disparity – will suffice.

### ***Pragmatic in Their Approach***

When writing research papers, “students most often are looking for the fastest means to a good grade.” (Laskowski, 306) “The bottom line ... is that they will do the minimal work possible to find the minimum number of resources required for their assignments. They want almost anything and they want it quickly. It doesn’t matter that it may not be the best or most reliable source.” (Seal, 142)

“Unsurprisingly, what mattered most to students while they were working on course related research assignments was passing the course (99%), finishing the assignment (97%), and getting a good grade (97%). Yet, three-quarters ... also reported they considered carrying out comprehensive research of a topic (78%) and learning something new (78%) of importance to them, too.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 4)

Students are aware that many sources of information exist but they are pragmatic about managing their time, effort, and doing what needs to be done in order to meet their needs. They “are not naive about sources, systems, and services.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 33)

“Many of today’s college students, no matter where they are enrolled and no matter what they are studying, adopt a strategic approach to their information-seeking research. Students use a strategy driven by efficiency and predictability in order to manage and control a staggering amount of information that is available to them in college settings. Moreover, students consciously manage their research tasks and activities within the constraints of the course-related research process (i.e., time, grades, professor’s expectations).” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 35)

### ***Favorite Sources for Coursework***

For course related research, students employ “a strategy driven by meeting their instructors’ expectations (course readings) and, at the same time, obtaining as many results as possible early on (ie: using Google search).” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 21)

Most (90%) also use library resources, especially scholarly databases often introduced to them by librarians in their initial years on campus. These they value for their “credible content, in-depth information, and the ability to meet instructors’ expectations.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 3)

They rely on “a small set of common information sources—close at hand, tried and true” that they use routinely in the same order for one assignment after another. “Many techniques were learned in high school and ported to college.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 3)

Students have little idea how Google works but they trust it. Their use of Google affects the way they approach other search tools. They seem “oblivious to the logic of search or how to generate or parse search results with much patience or intelligence. ...[This is turn] “leads to problems of having too much information or not enough information ... both stemming from a lack of sufficient conceptual understanding of how information is organized’.” (Kolowich)

### ***Drowning & No Understanding of How to Swim***

84 percent of surveyed students in the PIL studies say that when it comes to course-based research, getting started is their biggest challenge. (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 3)

This may account for their searching choices as noted previously. Unfortunately, that choice often leads to their next challenge “narrowing down topics, finding relevant resources, sorting through too many results from online searches, and evaluating the credibility.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 32)

They often are not familiar with the ideas and the language of the topics that they are asked to explore and have no clear concept of what their finished product should look like (Fister). As well, they lack “understanding of search logic, how to build a search to narrow/expand results, how to use subject headings, and how various search engines (including Google) organize and display results.” (Asher, Duke & Green) And so, they get overwhelmed.

Add to this “widespread and endemic gaps in students' understanding of the basic concepts of academic research, including: (1) an inability to correctly read and understand citations, (2) little or no understanding of cataloging and information organization systems, (3) no organized search strategies beyond “Google-style” any word, anywhere searches, and (4) poor abilities in locating and evaluating resources (of all types)” (Asher, Duke & Green) and it is no wonder that “most students struggle with the same frustrating open-endedness ... trying to find information and conduct research for college courses.” (Head & Eisenberg, 3)

They may be comfortable with technology and have good computer skills but these do not translate into research skills. “Using the Web gives students the sense that they have the world’s knowledge at their fingertips, but it does nothing to develop critical thinking ability, which is essential for effective research.” (Seal, 142)

Students seem to lack “the research acumen for framing an inquiry in the digital age where information abounds and intellectual discovery” becomes “paradoxically overwhelming for them.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 3)

Students have “developed an information strategy to head off complex information landscapes that change and grow ... most students—not all—use a strategy that tries to manage and control ... all of the information that is swimming in front of them when they sit down at a computer and try to find research sources for a paper due in three or perhaps four days. (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 39)



### ***Faculty as Research Coaches & Avoiding Librarians***

“Students do, in fact, use libraries— but most of students used library resources—not librarian-related services. ” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 16)

Few (circa 30%) “used library services that required interacting with librarians.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 1) “Whether or not those services were computer or ... face-to-face ... made no difference. As they progress through their degree ‘they turned more and more to their instructors for research coaching’ often using them to help evaluate what they found.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, 3) 49% “frequently asked instructors for assistance with assessing the quality of sources for course work—far fewer asked librarians (11%) for assistance.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 3)

At first glance, this may not seem problematic. After all, what is wrong with students relying on their professors to guide them in finding and evaluating sources? And, so what if most never consult a librarian. However, in light of research findings into faculty perceptions of how information literacy develops, this approach may not be the most efficient, effective or optimal means of developing information literacy skills in students.

Discussing work by Valentine, Laskowski in the article “The Role of Technology in Research: Perspectives from Students and Instructors”, indicates that faculty and student views of research assignments often differ and that there are communication difficulties because of it. Valentine concludes: “the source of this communication breakdown may have been the research process itself. Getting materials from which to create the paper was more daunting, and took much more time, than many of these students had expected. And, it is possible that professors are unaware of just how tangled up students can get trying to do research in this age of information overload.’ ... While the faculty member or instructor may know exactly or assume what research has been done in a particular field, they need to remember that the undergraduate student does not have the same background to draw upon.” (Laskowski, 306)

Other research tends to confirm that faculty may not realize the depth of difficulty some students encounter and that many would benefit from a less haphazard and more formal and structured educational approach to help them succeed. A study by McGuinness that chose two divergent disciplines – Sociology and Civil Engineering – to focus on yielded the following five faculty perceptions (common to both disciplines) with respect to information literacy development (ILD).

1. “We’re Already Doing It!”: for the most part, faculty believe that “the prevailing instructional paradigm ... is fundamentally designed to encourage the development of information skills ... although no formal IL structures ... exist.” A sort of tacit assumption that “students somehow absorb and develop the requisite knowledge and skills through the very process of preparing a piece of written coursework, and by applying the advice meted out by their supervisors.”
2. “The Effect of Student Motivation”: a pervasiveness belief that “the extent to which students develop as information literate individuals depends almost entirely on personal interest, individual motivation and innate ability, rather than on the quality and format of the available instructional opportunities ... As a corollary, therefore, failure to become information literate is viewed principally as a function of a student’s personal decision not to focus on developing his or her information competence.”

3. “They’ll ‘Pick it up’ Over Time”: belief that “students will ‘pick it up’ as they go along ... there is a tacit assumption ... that an information literate mindset is developed in this haphazard manner. To an extent, it appears that these expectations are linked to the academics’ personal experiences of university education, where they developed information skills gradually, and usually without much direct assistance ... students [are expected] to fend for themselves ... in the ‘sink or- swim’ model ... IL is developed in a largely inconsistent, ad-hoc manner or through a process of ‘trial and error,’ ... [faculty] believe that students do eventually become information literate ... [but] were generally unable to explain the mechanism by which it occurs ... A consequence ... is, therefore, the assumption that no formal structure is necessary to encourage ILD among students—it is seen as a natural, almost intuitive process, whereby students will somehow work it out for themselves ... throughout the course of their education.”
4. “ILD as a Social Process”: “students learn how to be information literate mainly through working with their fellow students, and turning to their peers for assistance when difficulties are encountered ... Once again, this belief points to an assumption that ILD should constitute a naturally occurring process, when the appropriate conditions prevail.”
5. “Problem-Solving For ILD”: developing “an IL mindset, centers on the concept of ‘applying theory to practice,’ which is predicated on the notion that teaching in itself is essentially futile, unless it is accompanied by opportunities to apply the skills that are learned ... IL is seen to develop through the experience of being confronted with an unfamiliar situation or a seemingly intractable information problem, and in the process of gradually working out how to achieve a satisfactory solution or find an appropriate answer to a question ... faculty viewed problem-solving as the key context for development.” (McGuinness, 576-580)

These findings re faculty perceptions of the development of information literacy skills amongst students at all levels from undergraduate to graduate PhD students it turns out, are particularly telling with respect to the current situation on many campuses and they factor heavily into if and how information literacy development is, or is not, actively consulted upon and incorporated into the curriculum.

### ***Just Like Gambling***

For most undergraduate students, the difficulties encountered with doing research for course work is not from a lack of ideas, interest and/or motivation – “a large majority of them were conscientious and in courses to succeed and to learn.”

“Instead, for many students ... course-related research was difficult because it was more akin to gambling than completing college-level work. ... The beginning of research is when the first bets were placed. Choosing a topic is fraught with risk for many students. ... either a topic worked well or it failed when it was too late to change it.

Add in the constraints of timing, grades, and too much available information to scour—and the difficulties with beginning research are put into high relief. The odds of “winning” this bet are significantly compromised when these factors come into play.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 32-3)

Because of what the first steps of the research process signify about the entire process is what makes it the most difficult stage for students. The “first stages of research for course work initiate a process few students thoroughly understand and grasp with much confidence. Few students ... considered themselves wholly competent at completing research for one course research assignment to the next ... students reported that research meant finding all the information available about a topic, or in many cases, finding the right answer.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 33)

The conclusion reached by Head & Eisenberg is that “many students lacked the research acumen to frame a college-level research inquiry into something that was manageable to research and allowed them to complete the entire process.” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 33)

### ***Information Literacy & Library Anxiety: For Some More than Others***

A divide in incoming students has been noted with respect to technology and computer skills and this divide is directly related to socioeconomic status.

“Despite a widespread belief that the first-year college student of today is adept with all aspects of digital technology, this belief masks disparities that should be of some concern. If universities continue to make assumptions about students’ abilities, they make even the most basic transitional problems overwhelming to some. Working to retain students from all groups, but especially those from lower-income families, may require universities to devote ongoing resources for technology-training support that these students need for success. Only through these ongoing efforts will the digital divide among college students truly disappear and the potential for student computing initiatives be fully achieved.” (Goodfellow & Wade, 434)

It is interesting to note that, in terms of the above study, library searching skills were included along with computer-enhanced presentations and email as computer related proficiency skills. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that many library resources are now computer dependent but it is disconcerting on some levels. In this study, “more than 50% of students rated themselves unskilled at library searching.” (Goodfellow & Wade, 425)

A 2008 British Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) report, Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future, expands on this theme: “A much fuller research picture is available in the USA ... and it paints a picture of a large minority of freshmen entering college and university with low levels of information literacy and high levels of library anxiety. As might be expected, information skills correlate positively with entry-level SAT scores and subsequent grades.” (CIBER, 23)

“There are two particularly powerful messages emerging from recent research. When the top and bottom quartiles of students – as defined by their information literacy skills – are compared, it emerges that the top quartile report a much higher incidence of exposure to basic library skills from their parents, in the school library, classroom or public library in their earlier years. It seems that a new divide is opening up in the US, with the better-equipped students taking the prizes of better grades. At the lower end of the information skills spectrum, the research finds that intervention at university age is too late:

these students have already developed an ingrained coping behaviour: they have learned to 'get by' with Google.

The problem here is that they simply do not recognize that they have a problem: there is a big gap between their actual performance in information literacy tests and their self-estimates of information skill and library anxiety. The findings of these studies raise questions about the ability of schools and colleges to develop the search capabilities of the Google Generation to a level appropriate to the demands of higher education and research.

If a similar pattern obtains in the UK, the key point is that information skills have to be developed during formative school years and that remedial information literacy programmes at university level are likely to be ineffective. The big question is what form that training should take." (CIBER, 23-4)

### 2.3.1.2 Graduate Students Literature Review Skills

Studies of graduate students (doctoral candidates in particular) indicate that many have difficulty with the literature review portion of their dissertation. "The confidence students feel at the beginning of a research project flags quickly once the information search is underway. As sources accumulate ... they begin feeling overwhelmed and find that determining the relevance of sources to the question at hand to be particularly difficult ... For some, this difficulty extends to processing the gathered information." (Fleming-May, 210)

Many doctoral students have limited or undeveloped searching skills and "advisors provide little guidance in the process of collecting resources for and writing the literature review, considering it both the least important part of the dissertation and the section they were least proficient in themselves." (Fleming-May, 206) Students are hesitant to seek advice from their advisors in this process and most students do not think of librarians as viable counselors. Usually they go to colleagues.

Given studies on the research skills of undergraduate students, the mostly haphazard approach to teaching information literacy, and the tendency of faculty to think that students will just learn it "somehow", it should not be surprising that many graduate students (circa 50%) also have difficulty.

What is troubling is that "Several respondents seemed to have the attitude that the time for instruction in research tools and techniques was behind them, that showing a lack of research skill and knowledge at the point of doctoral studies would be inappropriate. "As a master's student, it wasn't so much expected that you knew what to do. At that point, I would have felt very comfortable asking, but now ... it is just pretty much expected; it is something basic we should already know how to do.'" (Fleming-May, 210)

And so, the cycle repeats itself!

"Faculty members, instructors and librarians all need to understand better the way students approach a research assignment ... in order to educate them effectively about the appropriate selection and use of research materials." (Laskowski, 307)

There are recommendations in a number of the research studies on student behaviour mentioned earlier (ie: CIBER, ERIAL, OCLC, PIL) that it would be useful to review in the context of the University of Lethbridge.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:31**

*Consider the suggestions in the “A Long View – Looking Forward” section (pages 96 to 101) of the recent OCLC Perceptions of Libraries, 2010 report. Some are comparable with other recommendations in this report but others are unique and worthy of consideration.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:32**

*Become familiar with the results and recommendations of the Project Information Literacy studies and work toward implementing their recommendations in the University of Lethbridge context.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:33**

*Explore a collaborative partnerships with CAETL, and/or other units as applicable, in moving forward on Recommendations 31 & 32; in particular, in initiating “a dialog among administrators, faculty and librarians across the academy” (Head & Eisenberg, 2010, 40) about the state of student research skills.*

### **2.3.1.3 Complicating and/or Limiting Factors for Library Involvement in the Academic Dimension of Engagement**

The role that pedagogical style and the curriculum play in student retention is major and faculty are perhaps the most important element on campus vis-à-vis student retention.

The five Faculties and the School of Graduate Studies are academic units that each have a group of students they are directly responsible for and a curriculum to create and deliver. The University Library, also considered an academic unit, has little curriculum and no particular subset of the student body that it is directly responsible for. Instead of delivering a curriculum, the University Library is responsible for the delivery of library services and support to all students. The Registrar’s Office and Student Services, considered critical to the issue of student retention, are support units.

The unique role of the Library, that combines elements of both academic and support services, is often taken for granted and overlooked.

Except for Library Science 2000 and the few other courses offered by the Library, any direct in-class teaching the Library staff does must be negotiated with faculty; link to a curriculum others create; and/or, be organized and offered to students as an add-on, usually voluntary, component to their other courses and primary focus.

It is this “no man’s land” within the academy that presents the greatest challenge to any library related curricular interventions and/or support initiatives to enhance the student experience and increase retention. Most, if not all, ideas relating to teaching and/or the curriculum require collaboration with others.

A student's need for library resources and services are intimately related to pedagogy and curriculum. Faculty "influence library use in many ways including through the classroom, through writing assignments that require library use, or by simply interacting with undergraduates by working jointly on projects or providing feedback on term papers." (Whitmire, 125) "Undergraduates who engaged in more student-faculty interactions, active learning, and writing activities reported greater library use." (Whitmire, 119) They also report greater gains in critical thinking.

Professors "often play a central role in brokering the relationship between students and librarians. Students routinely learn about librarians and library services directly from a professor's recommendation, or through librarians' in-class information sessions ... Students view professors as experts, and when the professor specifically recommends a librarian, students highly value this advice. Professors therefore regularly act as gatekeepers who mediate when and how students contact with librarian as they are working on research assignments. In this way, the attitude of professors towards librarians is a key determining factor in developing student/librarian relationships." (Asher, Duke & Green)

"Given librarians' structural placement as marginal to students' academic world", librarians cannot effectively address student needs for information literacy and academic research skill development "without active participation from teaching faculty" and that requires "principally social solutions." (Asher, Duke & Green)

ACRL in its essay, "Changing Roles of Academic and Research Libraries" developed from a roundtable discussion on technology and change in academic libraries convened in 2006, states that "Library staff must regard themselves as partners with faculty, offering tools and expertise that in many cases differ from what faculty members themselves possess. The working relationship between faculty and library staff must be one of conjoining complementary strengths to produce a result that neither partner could attain alone." (ACRL, 2006, 4)

Simple to write, hard to achieve.

"Communication difficulties between academic librarians and the faculty they serve are well documented in the LIS literature." (Fleming-May, 200) Unless these difficulties can be overcome there is limited impact that the Library can have on the curriculum and the integration of information literacy concepts into it in more cohesive and systematic ways.

To get faculty to refer students to the Library and its services appears to be a major challenge and the reasons for it complex. Some, like faculty perceptions of how information literacy develops, have already been covered. There are other factors relating to this issue that must also be addressed if a more productive working relationship is to be established.

Generally, library staff lack formal teaching experience and their knowledge of curriculum design needs to be enhanced. "For librarians to be truly integrated into the curriculum rather than offering one-shot sessions, they must have much more pedagogical and theoretical knowledge. Although practicing

librarians might have experience with library instruction, few have the background to transition easily” (Saunders, 107) into expanded roles in curriculum development.

There are disciplinary differences that must be kept in mind and accommodated in information literacy education. Although a particular subject liaison librarian and the faculty they support may have an exceptional working relationship, any information literacy programs based on individual collaboration between that librarian and individual faculty members, is always “tenuous” and subject to change depending on personnel, priorities, etc. As such, an existing information literacy program may be excellent, yet, impossible to maintain.

“The entrenched beliefs, perceptions and work practices, which are characteristic of academics in post-secondary institutions, may prevent them from engaging in collaborative initiatives with external parties, including librarians, particularly with regard to their teaching activities. ... academics are typically time-poor, attempting to combine teaching, research and administrative responsibilities, as well as keeping up-to-date within their fields. ... they are protective of the professional autonomy afforded by their position and as a result, tend to be resistant to change, particularly when imposed from outside ... faculty culture in general currently places a greater value on published research at the expense of teaching, which is not rewarded to the same extent as research activities.” (McGuinness, 575-6)

For the most part, faculty prefer information literacy development modules they can facilitate and deliver themselves (ex: setting assignments which incorporate information skills, discussing the research process in class, explaining discipline-specific resources) rather than those requiring a librarian to either deliver them (ex: subject-specific class, demonstration) or “instructional methods requiring a high degree of library–faculty collaboration, such as credit courses, team teaching and jointly designed assignments.” (McGuinness, 575)

It is interesting, though, to note the results of a 2007 study in which faculty who had worked with a librarian on course-integrated library instruction were interviewed. Collaboration time ranged from 15 minutes to 2 hours depending on the project and course. “Every faculty member interviewed considered the time spent on this activity a negligible price to pay in light of the benefits they realized.” In this study, librarians helped improve the quality of courses by providing “a higher caliber of discipline-based research instruction” that allowed faculty to “1) develop and implement new curricula by targeting and customizing access to relevant information resources, 2) improve their own research productivity since they learn new techniques and become familiar with new resources, and 3) save time in preparing research classes, interacting with students about information resources, and grading both individual assignments and group projects.” (Simmel 2007, 90 cited in ACRL,2010, Values, 46)

Even should the working relationship between librarians and faculty improve, and the demand for in-class instruction increase, this model of instruction by itself is not a scalable model. Methods for information literacy instruction that reach much larger numbers of students are required. (Reyes, 306)

“Administrators can also contribute ... by supporting curricular initiatives that reinforce collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty, and that promote the participation of librarians throughout

students' course of study." (Asher, Duke & Green) At Cornell, "in an effort to improve undergraduate teaching, the library and the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education have jointly funded the Cornell Undergraduate Information Competency Initiative (<http://infocomp.library.cornell.edu/>) ... [as a means to encourage faculty there] "to explore creative and effective ways to engage students and transform the curriculum through the redesign of undergraduate courses. At the heart of this program is the establishment of teams of academic partners including librarians, faculty, technologists, instructional designers, and writing instructors to rethink the classroom experience and redesign course work to emphasize research-based assignments. The assumption is that when undergraduates learn to do library research it will have a wide-ranging and lasting effect on their academic and personal lives." (Kenney, 487)

As noted above, there are no easy answers or solutions to the issue of information literacy and/or for initiating the radical reforms in pedagogy and curriculum that are being called for in the literature on higher education in general and the literature on student retention in particular. Both call for a shift away from the typical, traditional, lecture format as the primary mode of teaching at university and call for "a radical re-conceptualizing of the teaching and learning process, where the goal becomes 'helping students learn' rather than 'teaching.'" (Zundel & Deane, 20) This involves a shift in focus and use of much broader and more creative pedagogical and curricular design options.

Some of the educational practices considered to be most effective in retaining students, and how the academic library might play a role in them, are discussed next.

### 2.3.1.4 High Impact Educational Practices that Enhance Retention

"Colleges and universities that are particularly potent in terms of developing intellectual talent are characterized more by what they implement programmatically than simply by the level of intellectual talent they can enrol." (Pascarella, 22)

Major researcher in the field of student retention and primary researcher in the DEEP investigations, George D. Kuh, encourages the integration of library services and resources into the ten high-impact educational practices described in the booklet High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who has Access to Them, and Why They Matter. In response to the question "What is the one thing we should do to increase student engagement and success on our campus?", Kuh advocates that institutions "make it possible for every student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field." (Kuh, 2008, 19)

He also makes the following observation with respect to librarians: "many librarians know a great deal about how students spend their time, what they think and talk about, and how they feel, yet they are an underused educational resource. At some DEEP schools librarians contribute to first-year seminars and



orientation to college courses, academic advising, student-faculty research activities, and capstone seminars.”(Kuh et al, 2005, 312)

These ten activities are listed below and, as applicable, potential library involvement in them described and commented on.

### ***First Year Seminars and Experiences***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students` intellectual and practical competencies.” (Kuh, 2008, 9)

A number of studies “have demonstrated that freshman orientation courses enjoy a positive relationship with student persistence and strengthened academic performance.” (Pierard & Graves, 84) In one study the “authors found that , even in their junior year, student participants` grades were significantly higher, they reported increased use of university resources such as writing services and libraries, and their overall retention rate was 13 percent higher than their counterparts who did not participate.” (Pierard & Graves, 84)

It is interesting to note the observation of long time advocate for first year students, John N. Gardner, founder and executive director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College, senior fellow of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and distinguished professor emeritus of library and information science at the University of South Carolina in a 2003 ACRL plenary session: “I noted that in all my years working with hundreds of colleges and universities to support their efforts to improve the first year, I had observed that librarians were dramatically underrepresented in the power groups that convened on campuses to develop new visions for improving the first year.” (Hardesty, xv-xvi)

He then went on to issue a challenge to academic librarians “to become more active, assertive, involved, and invested in supporting and shaping this reform movement.” (Hardesty, xvi)

It is unclear from the Recruitment and Retention Integrated Planning web pages describing “Key Projects” just how involved library personnel will be in planning for the “First Year Experience Foundation Program.”

On other campuses the Library has been instrumental in taking a lead in the development of first year courses. (Todaro)

### **RECOMMENDATION:34**

*Encourage and support the creation of a “first year experience” course or foundations program on campus and advocate for the active participation of Library staff in curriculum design and delivery in order to ensure that the concepts of information literacy are given adequate consideration in the formulation of course content and pedagogy.*

There is a significant body of literature dealing with library staff involvement in first year programs as well as the integration of information literacy concepts into them and various means of delivery.

### **RECOMMENDATION:35**

*Explore the literature relating to library involvement in First Year Experience or Foundation programs in order to build a strong case for significant library involvement in the program.*

The participation of librarians runs the gamut from full membership on the team of instructors responsible for the first year program (Kuh, 2005, 32), through orienting instructors and teaching assistants on an annual basis re the benefits of library instruction (Jacobson & Mark) to almost no involvement other than perhaps giving the “tour of the library” that does little to “help student take developmentally appropriate next steps in strengthening their information literacy skills.” (Kirk, 11)

### **RECOMMENDATION:36**

*If staffing for the instruction of the First Year Experience Foundation Program is sufficiently flexible, encourage Library professional staff to become involved.*

“It may seem difficult to link a discrete freshman library experiences to long-term student success. However, one general outcome has an important bearing in this regard: The tendency of students who have had a positive introduction to libraries and other campus instructional support units to report higher use of those services throughout their four years.” (Pierard & Graves, 85)

### **RECOMMENDATION:37**

*Develop an assessment plan for whatever library or information literacy instruction is undertaken in connection with the First Year Experience Program.*

### **RECOMMENDATION:38**

*Advocate for the inclusion of a series of fun events that could be incorporated into the First Year Experience program and be actively involved in hosting a least one of them in the University Library.*

## ***Common Intellectual Experiences***

**DESCRIPTION:** “The older idea of a ‘core’ curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community ... These programs often combine broad themes – e.g., technology and society, global interdependence – with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.” (Kuh, 2008, 9)

Core courses (without the broad interdisciplinary themes) exist in particular disciplines and integrating information literacy development into Faculties like Education, Management or Nursing, that build on a disciplinary specific curriculum over time, is easier to design and enact in a cohesive and meaningful way than in more disciplinary diverse Faculties such as Arts and Science.

The University Library is involved with information literacy initiatives in many of the subject specific research courses taught on campus, with Liberal Education, and with other venues. For the most part, integrating information literacy into a specific program or discipline has been the purview of the subject

librarians. Should the University wish to strengthen its teaching goals in the area of information literacy, a systematic review of the current program as well as where and when information literacy could most realistically be embedded would need to be undertaken.

### **RECOMMENDATION:39**

*Work to document the current state of information literacy instruction in the various Faculties with a view to identifying the current state of affairs, any gaps and/or overlap that might exist, etc. Such information would be useful for future planning.*

Better, more pragmatic means than in-class instruction by a librarian, need to be explored as a means to reach greater number of students. Some of the themes included later in this section relate to achieving this objective.

### ***Learning Communities***

**DESCRIPTION:** “The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with ‘big questions’ that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link ‘liberal arts’ and ‘professional courses’; others feature service learning.” (Kuh, 2008, 10)

Some campuses use a team based approach for structuring learning communities that are meant to introduce students to the campus.

In Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot’s book, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student*, they describe the approach of Indiana Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to its First Year Seminar that is linked with other entry level courses to form learning communities: “An Instruction Team is a collaborative effort led by a member of the teaching faculty with a librarian, a technologist, a counselor and a student mentor (and any other pedagogical and/or evaluation specialist as needs may dictate)” (<https://gateway.uc.iupui.edu/Courses.aspx>) Team members work together on course design, implementation, and assessment.” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 376)

There have also been some interesting experiments using technology, course management systems in particular, to create learning communities. In some instances, such as the Nursing example below, a ‘pseudo course’ was created that served to provide a forum for librarians and others to increase interaction amongst themselves and students.

The collaborative efforts of nursing faculty and the nursing liaison librarian at Central Missouri State University created a learning community for nursing students that was a “‘pseudo course’ designed to provide library instruction, research assistance, and communication to all students enrolled in the nursing program.” (Dinwiddie & Winters, 37) The artificial course that was not part of the curriculum, had as its purpose “to deliver additional instructional support content and communication to a specific cohort of students who are enrolled in a particular course of study.” (Dinwiddie & Winters, 37) Called “Research Assistance for Nursing Students”, but referred to in short as the “Nursing Forum”, it was soon

used by the Nursing faculty to mount content that would be useful to students throughout their degree program, to facilitate specific research projects, etc. It was “a source for ready access to library information, online databases, and resource materials for their course work in the nursing program” and a means for them to access their subject librarian on a perpetual basis. (Dinwiddie & Winters, 41)

Is this concept of a ‘pseudo course’ within the Moodle course management system one that could be adapted for particular groups of students at the University of Lethbridge? Other institutions have used their course management system to “embed” their subject librarians. (Herring, Burkhardt & Wolfe)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:40**

*Explore the potential of pseudo courses to reach identifiable groups of students and to provide them with online access to their subject liaison librarian.*

### ***Writing-Intensive Courses***

**DESCRIPTION:** “These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice ‘across the curriculum’ has led to parallel efforts in such areas a quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.” (Kuh, 2008, 10)

The University Library is involved in teaching information literacy concepts in Writing 1000 courses and it appears that a module based format is being experimented with, or at least it was, when Blackboard was the course management system. (Mathenia)

Not all students take Writing 1000 but most are required to take at least one writing intensive course.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:41**

*Maintain, enhance, and strengthen the information literacy component of Writing 1000 and extend comparable content into all other courses recognized as meeting the writing component requirement of the GLER.*

At Arizona State University (ASU) a course entitled, Critical Reading and Thinking, is offered in order to “help students develop critical thinking and reading skills that are transferable ... to their other classes and, to their lives in general ... Students learn strategies for reading critically by interacting with a variety of sources and are encouraged to apply those strategies in their other courses to interpret, analyze and critically evaluate ideas.” (Crum)

The curriculum for this course “contains sequentially designed resources that support students as they conduct research and write papers throughout the semester. A custom-designed library guide, specific to the course, was added ... and quickly became one of the most popular guides on the ASU Libraries website.” (Crum)

Would it be useful to develop a comparable guide for Writing 1000?

**RECOMMENDATION:42**

*Explore the potential of developing an online guide relating to the Writing 1000 course content.*

Some University of Lethbridge students undertake Independent Studies courses some of which are writing intensive. It would be useful to develop a means of marketing the services of subject librarians to such students if there was a way to identify them on a semester by semester basis.

On other campuses, where students must complete “a significant independent project as part of their major program ... some academic programs have begun to require students to meet individually with a member of our reference staff early on in developing their projects. Since the work with the reference staff is situated in the context of an authentic research question in which the student has a considerable investment, these sessions provide an excellent opportunity for staff to engage students and challenge them to deepen their understanding of research strategies.” (Holmgren, 186) This particular library is also “exploring opportunities to create facilitated, collaborative work groups in which students can support one another and deepen their writing and speaking skills as they write their final projects and prepare for the oral presentation of their results.” (Holmgren, 186)

**RECOMMENDATION:43**

*Explore means of identifying students who are undertaking writing intensive independent study projects and market the services of a subject specialist librarian to them.*

### ***Collaborative Assignments and Projects***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.” (Kuh, 2008, 10)

The group study space provided by the University Library is often utilized for such work.

### ***Undergraduate Research***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines ... Scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students’ early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.” (Kuh, 2008, 10)

This is an active learning strategy that shifts the focus of education from instruction to discovery. In best case scenarios, this shift often leads to an increase in library use as students “develop the skills to discover what they need to know, where to find it, how to validate the quality of the information, and how to assemble the resources necessary to solve problems.” (Oblinger, 48)

### ***Diversity/Global Learning***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies – which may address ... diversity, world cultures, or both – often explore ‘difficult differences’ such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.” (Kuh, 2008, 10)

In the “Environment” section of this report diversity is covered in terms of activities that the Library might undertake to make minority elements on campus feel more welcome and/or to increase the number and types of diversity related learning events that take place on campus.

### ***Service Learning, Community-based Learning***

**DESCRIPTION:** “In these programs, field-based ‘experiential learning’ with community partners is an instructional strategy – and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.” (Kuh, 2008, 11)

In the Communication section of this report, there are a number of collaborative possibilities for “service projects/undertakings” that could be done in conjunction with the University Library.

### ***Internships***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting – usually related to their career interests – and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.” (Kuh, 2008, 11)

Internship/work study programs have, in the past, been utilized by the University Archives. It would be useful to explore whether or not such programs could be used in the Library as well.

### ***Capstone Courses and Projects***

**DESCRIPTION:** “Whether they’re called ‘senior capstones’ or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they’ve learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of ‘best work’, or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.” (Kuh, 2008 11)

Comments relating to the “significant independent project” contained in the “Writing-Intensive Courses” section above as also applicable here.

## 2.2.1.5 Other Opportunities for Information Literacy/Library Awareness

### *Remediation/Developmental Courses*

There are many benefits to integrating additional academic supports into the regular curriculum. Because many students, not just those from special populations, enter higher education with underdeveloped study skills this integration can avoid the rejection of remedial programs offered on a voluntary basis.

“Integrating skill development into the discipline context removes barriers to participating in such programmes, allows all students to benefit from improved academic skills and helps to develop a shared understanding of course expectations. Furthermore, in the context of student diversity, integration tends to normalize the process of having difficulties with study and the need for assistance. It also addresses difficulties that may arise for students before they are manifested in poor academic performance ...The integration of the study skills in the mainstream curriculum means that they are immediate to students’ needs and therefore more likely to be taken on board.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 172-3)

There should be an information literacy component in any developmental program undertaken by the University of Lethbridge. This approach has been successfully undertaken with respect to the First Nations Transitions Program for example in order to provide the fundamentals of information literacy required for advanced study.

Are there other programs of a similar nature on the campus that would benefit from a comparable approach?

#### **RECOMMENDATION:44**

*Undertake an assessment of the impact of the Library related component of all developmental programs created to date.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:45**

*Explore the benefits of undertaking initiatives such as creating library related web sites that are tailored specifically to First Nations, International, and other special student groups.*

### *Orientations For New Students*

The University of Cincinnati Libraries created simple goals for their first year student orientation sessions. They were: “UL is a friendly place, UL has friendly staff who can answer questions, and UL has resources that will meet your research needs. These goals acted as a cornerstone that librarians used to build the rest of the first-year experience.” (Tenofsky, 288)

The University of Lethbridge Library is currently involved in the orientation program for new students in both the fall and spring terms. The goals of that involvement, although never formalized and unless

they have changed significantly, were much like those of the University of Cincinnati Libraries in the quotation above.

Today's students often consult their parents for advice and many campuses, including the University of Lethbridge, offer programs for parents as well as new students during their orientation to campus activities.

"Orientations ... provide librarians opportunities to connect with parents to support student success." (ACRL, 2010, *Values*, 34) They are "the perfect target for library outreach efforts...[and] academic librarians can be enlisted to be accessible to parents who expect their child to receive personalized assistance and support" (Bell, 2008, 2-3). The University of Rochester has found it beneficial to host a breakfast meeting with parents at their orientation event. (Marshall, 29) To date, the University Library has not been involved with parent activities at University of Lethbridge orientation events.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:46**

*Articulate goals for the Library's involvement in New Student Orientation activities and explore involvement in the parent portion of this day.*

#### ***Expand workshop offerings***

Many libraries have had success by offering a diverse selection of workshops on subjects such as "Web page creation, scanning and Power Point presentation development, and Internet-based research sessions in business, science, the humanities, and the social sciences ... Library faculty work closely with teaching faculty to develop curriculum-related instruction sessions, resources for courses, and Web pages, all designed with the student in mind." (Rushing & Poole, 97)

To date, at the University of Lethbridge, the approach to information literacy instruction has favoured subject specific offerings by subject librarians rather than this more general approach.

### **2.3.1.6 Supporting Faculty Teaching**

Studies in various locations indicate significant relationships at all grade levels (K–12) between student achievement and well functioning school libraries with trained staff. (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell; Ontario Library Association; Ross; U.S. National Commission on Libraries & Information Science (NCLIS))

In particular, where the level of collaboration between the library staff and teachers is high, school achievement increases "even when the effect of household income, per pupil spending, teacher-pupil ratio, or students' race/ethnicity' was taken into account." (Lance, ii)

Collaboration in the school setting includes librarians identifying and locating curriculum related resource materials for teachers, planning and/or teaching with teachers, and motivating students to read. "Students achieve academically when their visits to libraries bring them into contact with librarians as teachers and co-teachers." (Lance, xiv)



Fundamental to achieving collaboration in the school library setting and, as a consequence student achievement, is the visible support of librarian attempts to connect with teachers by principals. “School librarians ... need principals to integrate the school library into the whole school plan, support librarian and teacher collaborations, regard librarians as essential to learning, and encourage librarian-led staff development.” (ACRL, 2010, *Values*, 59) Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

One has to wonder, if these relationships between student achievement and library involvement in the K to 12 school years exist, would they not continue to hold true in the postsecondary environment as well? One would think that librarians could add value to faculty teaching in the post-secondary situation just as they do in the school setting.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:47**

*That the Library enhance its services and resources aimed at assisting with and enriching faculty teaching and to more actively collaborate with faculty and with units on campus, such as CAETL, that have teaching as their focus.*

What follows is a mix of research study results and other ideas of potential activities that could assist faculty in carrying out their teaching responsibilities:

### ***Bibliographies on Relevant Topics with Institutional Interest***

#### **RECOMMENDATION:48**

*Explore the feasibility of creating and maintaining (perhaps in consultation with other units as appropriate) bibliographies on topics of current interest to the campus community (ie: student retention; active teaching/learning strategies; best practices for post-secondary instructors; etc.). SDI profiles/automatic searches for databases covering relevant subject areas could be used.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:49**

*With the intense local interest about First Nations people, create – and continually update – a literature search and annotated bibliography on the topic of First Nations people and university education in Canada and make it available via the Library’s web pages.*

New teaching resources acquired by the University Library are listed on the Library’s website but they are very buried and difficult to find. Is it possible to better highlight and/or make them more prominent? (NOTE: This link was broken in November when first tried. Once reported, it was later fixed.) Could this bibliography be cross posted on the CAETL website to give it wider exposure? See the Resource web page for faculty at Honolulu Community College:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/resource/resource>)

In collaboration with CAETL, provide a synopsis of research relating to teaching in the postsecondary environment for posting on the web. The synopsis might take the form of a “best practices”, “tips for better teaching” or some other such posting. The Lurleen B. Wallace Community College ([http://www.lbwcc.edu/library/research\\_help/information\\_literacy.aspx](http://www.lbwcc.edu/library/research_help/information_literacy.aspx)) has such a site for faculty development with respect to information literacy. Ideally, this information would be endorsed and made available via the CAETL website in addition to the Library website. See also the teaching tips page

of the Honolulu Community College:

(<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm>)

### ***Course Management Systems and Embedded Resources***

Another means of identifying and delivering curriculum related resources is to integrate library services into the campus course management system. For students it is the primary digital space in which they do academic work and for faculty, a major communications tool for reaching students. One example of how the library at Duke University went about doing this is available in the Daly article entitled, “Embedding Library Resources into Learning Management Systems”.

“Wrapping student support into coursework makes the support services inescapable, eliminates obstacles of time and place, and takes advantage of the time when colleges have the best access to their students.

Moreover, integrating support services creates a new type of shared experience for the students, thereby nurturing their relationships and their ability to support one another. Students need not feel singled out or stigmatized by being referred for help because support becomes simply a feature of being a student at their college.” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 16)

The Library needs to reposition its staff, resources and “information tools, resources, and expertise so that they are embedded into the teaching, learning and research enterprises” (Lewis, 420) that students and faculty use in their daily lives. This is the course management system.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:50**

*That the Library make the integration of its services and resources into Moodle, the course management software system utilized on campus, a high priority.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:51**

*That some sort of Library presence be available for every course that utilizes the Moodle software. This may require the building of instructional modules and/or other interfaces for the campus course management systems that are generic in nature rather than custom created.*

### ***Course View versus the Disciplinary Approach***

In the university context, identifying curriculum related resources for course support has traditionally been from a disciplinary perspective. Libraries typically create subject guides to the literature with a disciplinary focus for use by students and others.

Students, however, tend to focus on courses, assignments and projects and are often not in a position to comprehend a disciplinary approach to the literature until much later in their studies. “Many do not have a good grasp of the academic discipline. It is only after a series of courses that this understanding begins to take shape. Some never grasp the concept of a ‘discipline.’ Others may gain an understanding in their majors, but do not transfer this comprehension to other academic domains. The concept of disciplines is not usually part of a student’s mental model; therefore, the collocation of resources by discipline is not recognized.” (Reeb & Gibbons, 125)

“Surveys, usability tests, and usage statistics demonstrate that students do not relate well to subject guides ... library resources organized or delivered at a course level are more in line with how undergraduate students approach library research.” (Reeb & Gibbons, 123)

A few institutions have experimented with projects that shift the focus from the discipline back to the course in order to better align with student thinking. The University of Rochester, “developed a system (open source software) to integrate faculty course Web pages with related library materials” (ie: their guides). This “provides the library with an opportunity to promote additional resources that students may be interested in reviewing while obtaining course materials.” (Stowe & Lindahl, 4)

“The CoURse Resources System, developed by staff at the University of Rochester Libraries, is a ColdFusion (CFML) system with an SQL table structure. Through this Web-based system, librarians are able to quickly create library resource guides tailored for individual courses.” It allows students to find library resource guides developed for specific courses. “In essence, the system is a relational database of ‘best library resources’ and course offerings. Therefore, the course guide for a repeated class ... requires very little, if any, editing from semester to semester.” (Reeb & Gibbons, 126)

The open-source software for this was available free.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:52**

*Read the Reeb & Gibbons article and explore the possibility of creating a comparable system for course guides at the University of Lethbridge. In addition, consider the other suggestions in this article re naming options, etc. with respect to subject guides, and explore the possibility of linking to them from within Moodle.*

The Libraries at North Carolina State University developed a set of tools that are both course-centric (ie: mapped onto the campus curriculum) and pervasive (ie: available from a number of access points -- library management system, website, etc.). (Duckett & Sierra; North Carolina State University Libraries) These too are also worth investigating for possible adaptation to the University of Lethbridge situation.

#### ***Workshops for Faculty***

“Librarians can also add value to faculty teaching by participating in institutional efforts to increase faculty instructional skills (e.g., grants for faculty projects or teaching workshops and seminars).” (Levinson-Rose and Menges 1981, 403 cited in ACRL, 2010, Values, 46)

In the past, such workshops have taken place at the University of Lethbridge in collaboration with CAETL and other units such as Research Services.

### ***2.3.2 The Library’s Role in Social Engagement***

The sense of community on university campuses is something that many believe is eroding and becoming “increasingly obscured, with negative consequences for both faculty and students ... the lack of interactivity diminishes students’ expectations for their education experience.” (Bickford & Wright, 4)

“A real community ... exists only when its members interact in a meaningful way that deepens their understanding of each other and leads to learning.” (Bickford & Wright, 2-3)

The objective of social engagement is to build community. It “involves students making friends and developing peer networks, breaking their isolation and stimulating their identification with their faculty and university ... Academic engagement is linked with social engagement in that it is more likely that students will engage academically if they feel comfortable and have friends at university and in their course ... academic and social engagement are promoted in a number of ways. Often, they reinforce each other.” (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 173)

Because the University Library supports the faculty and students of all five Faculties and the School of Graduate Studies, it cuts “across all disciplines and functions ... [and] serves a significant social role. It is a place where people come together on levels and in ways that they might not in the residence hall, classroom, or off-campus location.” (Elteto, Jackson & Lim, 328) It is a sort of physical crossroads for the institution – a somewhat neutral or third space on the campus and because of this “activities and functions can be more successful in the library than in other locations.” (Weiner, 9)

In an article dealing with the experiences of minority students on campus, Elteto, Jackson & Lim quote from Geoffrey Freeman’s book, *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space*, and describe the library as the “only centralized location where new and emerging information technologies can be combined with traditional knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment that supports today’s social and educational patterns of learning, teaching, and research. Whereas the Internet has tended to isolate people, the library, as a physical place, has done just the opposite.” (Elteto, Jackson & Lim, 328)

In many ways the Library acts as a gathering place and campus community center. The question is, can this role be strengthened and purposefully utilized to foster social engagement?

Since the role that the Library can play in fostering social engagement on campus does not depend on negotiation with faculty the way academic engagement does, the Library can – and does – create programs of its own. This section of the report explores a number of ideas for increasing this role. Since programming is “most effective when ... developed in partnership with others seeking similar educational outcomes” (Hisle, 175) a later section explores potential partners for collaboration.

### **2.3.2.1 Promoting Community – Learning from Public Libraries**

Public libraries have a long tradition of working to promote community. Although their mandate, in the past, has been considered very different from that of the academic library, there may well be lessons to learn from the public library sector about community outreach and community building. Some activities could prove useful in an academic environment, such as the University of Lethbridge, that is actively trying to engage its students socially as well as academically.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:53**

*Review the literature with respect to public library outreach and community building strategies with a view to adapting them to the academic environment.*

**RECOMMENDATION:54**

*Consider advocating for a “Core Book” program at the University of Lethbridge.*

### 2.3.2.2 Complementary Learning Opportunities

“Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program.” (Kuh, 2005, 53) They enrich educational experiences and foster a sense of community. These types of events provide an opportunity for collaboration with other groups on campus such as the Students’ Union, a campus club, etc.

Some possible initiatives include:

#### ***Faculty Research***

Connect students with faculty research through a faculty lecture series. “These lectures help to foster positive relationships among faculty members, student and library staff and support the achievement of teaching, learning and research goals.” (Cotton & Pfaff, 256)

Panel discussions and informal gatherings could provide students with opportunities to learn about what professors are researching and available career options in particular disciplines.

#### ***Diversity Related Events***

“The social milieu of communities rapidly changes not through the presence of distinct groups, but by their association with one another in shared spaces.” (Welburn & Welburn, 5)

Having the opportunity to interact with individuals who differ from oneself is one of the primary factors of growth for students in university. “Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable lessons about themselves and other cultures.” (Kuh et al, 2005, 53)

The topic of diversity is such an important one that it is covered separately in conjunction with the theme of “Environment” later in the report.

#### ***Workshops with Diverse Participants***

Software, skills and/or workshops open to a diversity of age and status groups. In Creating the Customer Driven Library, Woodward describes her experience with a computer workshop originally intended for traditional students that “became almost a club for older students, senior university employees, and even retired faculty ... What began as a workshop became a permanent institution. Older faculty bonded with older students and helped them learn the ropes ... A sixty-something student told me he had always thought of the university as a cold, impersonal place, but his on-campus life completely changed when he began attending the workshop.” (Woodward, 95)

#### ***Other Possibilities***

“Other types of events such as panel discussions, poetry slams, art openings, and guest speakers have helped to foster an image of accessibility for students, faculty and community members.” (Switzer, 296)

### 2.3.2.3 Fun, Social, & Memorable Events

“A wide variety of out-of-class experiences have a positive influence on academic and intellectual development, especially those in which academic and nonacademic aspects are integrated.” (Hardesty, 121)

“First year students may view the traditional academic library as an overwhelming place ... The typical first-year student’s experience is based on a high school library with a relatively navigable collection and one or more readily known librarians, or a high school without any library at all ... 75% to 85% of college students surveyed consistently used words like ‘scary, overpowering, lost, helpless, and confused’ to describe the way they felt in the library. Such feelings are defined formally in the literature as library anxiety” (Hardesty, 123)

“A library that supports fun, non-traditional activities will invoke positive attitude about its space” (Dennis, 90) and, one would hope, its staff and services.

Creating fun, as opposed to serious, events on campus was one of the suggestions from the Recruitment and Retention focus group meeting with faculty. To overcome library anxiety, particularly amongst new students, some academic libraries offer social, familiarizing, and/or playtime opportunities usually at the start of a new academic year or semester. In keeping with the FISH! Philosophy, it is good for both work culture and customers to have fun and to find ways to “serve or delight people in a meaningful, memorable way.” (Mind Resources)

There are already public relations related events that occur in the Library throughout the year. What other types of social and/or fun events could also be held in the Library?

#### **RECOMMENDATION:55**

*Encourage the PR Committee to expand its offerings of fun activities that benefit students and ensure that the events offered to date, that have proven popular with students, be continued.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:56**

*Explore what other kinds of fun, social, events the Library might sponsor either in conjunction with campus wide events such as Fresh Fest and/or as isolated, “just for fun,” events throughout the year.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:57**

*Use students to help generate ideas for such events (see the Marketing section below).*

Included here are a few ideas of the sorts of activities of this type that other academic libraries are hosting on their campuses:

#### ***Gaming Nights***

“Libraries offering gaming events garner overwhelmingly positive feedback from their patrons.” (Levine, page 36)

### ***Parties***

One example is the Hubbub Party sponsored by the University of Kentucky Libraries and IT to welcome new students to the Hub (ie: their information commons area). (Greenwell)

The web postings for this activity have a number of interesting ideas that proved popular with their students and that could be utilized as standalone events and/or in conjunction with other activities at the University of Lethbridge.

### ***Murder Mystery Nights***

### ***Movie Nights***

### ***Speed Dating Nights***

Speed dating events have been held by public libraries with the “catch” that participants must bring with them one or two of their favourite books. (Wollan)

Perhaps this could be altered to make room for a picture of one’s favourite piece of art, a poem, etc. Or have “diversity” rather than “dating” as a theme.

### ***Sporting Event Celebrations***

### ***Dog check out – Yale Law School’s Monty***

Whether a hoax or not, this is a novel idea -- a dog that can be checked out and played with to relieve student stress. One of the University Library staff members has already volunteered her dog.

## **2.3.2.4 Building Traditions**

“Traditions remain a centrepiece of campus life. They endure because they are important symbols for students and their alma maters ... The best traditions – the ones that survive – are about bonding and belonging; they create an enduring link between the student and the institution. They can be light-hearted ... or as solemn as a convocation ceremony ... What’s important ... is that they create a lasting connection with the university. Alumni relish traditions that stand the test of time. And so do students.” (Drolet, 2011, 14)

Any traditions built must stand the diversity test and “it’s the meaningful traditions that involve everybody that survive best. Or, the ones that are fun for all.” (Drolet, 2011, 16)

“Sporting events are the most obvious of these activities, where students can identify with the team, but sporting events do not appeal to all students. Other institutional events include events that open the school year, mark graduation, pay tribute to current and past heroes ... events that recur on an annual basis, that are endorsed at the highest level, that provide meaning to the student about what it means to attend this college.” (Seidman, 239)

What are the University of Lethbridge's traditions? Is it possible for the Library to "piggy-back" on any of the existing ones, or, could it create a new tradition?

**RECOMMENDATION:58**

*Consider hosting some event/activity in conjunction with Fresh Fest in early September and/or convocation ceremonies in Spring/Fall.*

**RECOMMENDATION:59**

*Reflect on the potential of Library sponsored complementary learning activities and/or fun, social, events to become traditions and choose one or two to focus on in terms of building a new, recognizable, University of Lethbridge tradition connected to the Library.*



## 2.4 The Environment: Putting Students First

“Even a casual visitor can walk onto a college campus and know, almost instantly, whether the college is a welcoming place – and whether the college community *believes* that all students can learn.” (SENSE, 14) “Retention is complex and multi-dimensional and extends far beyond the academic qualifications of entering freshmen.” (Creighton)

The environment on campus and how welcoming, friendly and accommodating it is to students – particularly those in first year – has been identified in the literature as one of the primary factors in student retention. “Student institutional departure is as much a reflection ... of the institution, as it is of the attributes of the students who enter that institution.” (Tinto (1987) quoted by Seidman, 10-11)

The environment is many things – some tangible like buildings and infrastructure and some intangible like campus culture and staff attitudes.

The tangible elements of the environment are easier to understand and money can buy them. The intangible elements are more subtle and it takes more than money to perfect them. Institutional culture for example “reflects the character of an organization and generally is defined as the sum total of the values, customs, traditions and beliefs that shape how people behave. Culture cannot simply be declared or legislated — it is established and maintained by people” (Bradley, 2) and it provides “a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus.” (Zepke & Leach, 53)

The culture of an institution is often a deciding factor in how students from underrepresented populations manage on campus. It is not solely dependent on their academic preparation whether they continue or not. “As student diversity increases institutions must create climates that welcome, accept, respect, affirm and value diversity, creating ‘an accepting culture’ or ‘ethos’.” (Zepke & Leach, 52) To do this requires “significant adaptation by institutional cultures. Changes will play out in each contact students have with the organization ... The challenge is to find ways of adapting our practice.” (Zepke & Leach, 54)

It is because the environment of the campus (particularly the intangible elements) are so important to student retention that “Enhancing the Student Experience” is one of the strategic directions of the [University of Lethbridge’s Strategic Plan 2009-2013](#). The Plan also calls for recognizing and promoting “the essential role of staff in keeping the campuses welcoming, functioning, and modern.” (13)

Everyone on campus has a role to play in making the university the best it can be.

George Kuh tells a story of one woman on a DEEP campus who ran a coffee shop located in one of the campus buildings. “She had a personal greeting for almost everyone -- encouraging some, cajoling others, and freely dispensing her own flavor of advice about students’ academic performance and social life ... Miss Rita explained to us that it is important to let the students know she cares for them, so she takes the time to ‘give them a little love when they stop by.’” (Kuh et al, 2005, [Student Success in College](#), 171)

Apparently, when Kuh told this story at a professional meeting, a colleague told them “about his daughter who, during her commencement weekend, insisted that her parents meet two people. One was the president, the other was Miss Rita, who, she explained when making introductions, ‘lifted my spirits every day’ and was one of the very special people” on campus. (Kuh et al, 2005, Student Success in College, 171)

Kuh concludes: “Miss Rita represents the thousands of staff members at colleges and universities across the country who are in the company of students for countless hours. Their interest, concern and nurturing attitude are essential to a supportive campus culture committed to student success ... DEEP schools would be much different places without such people.” (Kuh et al, 2005, Student Success in College, 171)

Perhaps everyone in the region has a role to play. In Quebec, the entire Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean region, not just the schools and campuses in the area, got behind local retention efforts. Through a variety of means including an ad campaign that “drilled” into people, the thought that “Each young person needs encouragement every day”, the local people “pulled together in a successful home-grown initiative to keep young people in school. In a few short years, the region has dramatically cut dropout rates as it developed and then implemented measures to keep its youth first in high school, then in junior college, and finally in university.” (Drolet, 2010, 14)

Is it, in any way possible, to replicate this broader context to the issue of student retention locally? This is beyond the scope of the Library but may be something that the University wishes to explore.

What follows is a discussion of the theme of “environment” with particular reference to the University Library explored in five parts: Customer Service and the Role of Library Staff; Library as Place; Library as Learning Space; The Library as a Virtual Entity; and finally, Accepting and Embracing Diversity.

### ***2.4.1 Customer Service and the Role of Staff***

Much has been written about the atmosphere that the academic library has the potential to contribute to a campus. The library serves all campus constituencies providing “egalitarian common spaces associated with learning and culture”(Eteto, Jackson, & Lim, 335). It is free, open to everyone, and non-commercial. And it is often amongst “the busiest, most welcoming spaces on a college campus.” (Eteto, Jackson, & Lim, 335) It is the campus community center mentioned earlier.

As such, the University Library should strive to be exemplary with respect to all aspects of the environment – both the tangible and intangible elements.

“Great experiences are memorable, special and make us want to return for more ... So what would constitute a great library experience? The obvious answer is great customer service. People like being treated well. When they get poor customer service they will likely go elsewhere.” (Bell, 2009, 6)

Unfortunately, according to the OCLC 2006 report, Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources, “libraries have work to do regarding customer service. The customer service category yielded the highest number of negative associations in this benchmark study ... When asked to provide in their own

words two positive and two negative associations about libraries ... negative customer service associations outnumbered positive associations 1,106 to 238.” (Storey, 2006)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:60**

*Encourage each and every one of the Library staff to strive to be “the Miss Rita” in a student’s life on campus. The person that makes the difference in their lives and their success as a student.*

“Most institutions do not align their reward systems to the goal of enhanced student retention. It is one thing to talk about the importance of increasing student retention, it is another to ... adopt institutional faculty and staff reward systems that promote the behaviors that would reinforce that goal.” (Tinto, 9)

One college in the United States “codified a personal touch philosophy: Personal Touch — Respect, Responsibility, and Responsiveness in all relationships. The philosophy’s rollout included revising the college’s mission statement and adjusting individual job descriptions to include the personal touch. Employees’ annual reviews include rating their ability to approach their day-to-day work using the personal touch philosophy.” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 13)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:61**

*Make customer service a focus and priority of the University Library; set priorities, goals, and objectives for customer service; benchmark performance over time; and commit necessary resources to ensure that exemplary service for library users becomes a reality.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:62**

*Create a written philosophy or statement of public service standards for staff to aspire to; make exemplary service and a welcoming attitude in the performance of public service responsibilities a clear expectation of staff; and create ways and means to recognize and reward staff who are service oriented, inclusive, and welcoming.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:63**

*Provide staff training opportunities to enhance service levels and foster a culture within the Library that values enhancing the user experience, particularly for new and minority students.*

One measure of how well the University Library is achieving its customer service aim are the results of the LibQUAL+ surveys.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:64**

*That the results and comments from the LibQUAL+ surveys be used to identify potential areas for improvement for the University Library.*

## 2.4.2 The Library as Place

First impressions are the most important.

“Students begin forming their impressions of college immediately, and initial thoughts quickly become firm opinions. So, ideally, colleges act with the understanding that every action can either engage or alienate a student. Do students receive a helpful answer on a phone call or are they transferred multiple times? Are they greeted with warmth or indifference when they walk onto campus? Can they easily find what they need? These impressions – whether solid or shaky – are the foundation on which student engagement is built.” (SENSE, 5) Although this quotation refers to the campus as a whole, it can be applied equally well to the academic library.

### RECOMMENDATION:65

*Utilize the questions in the above quotation as a starting point to evaluate the current environment of the University Library vis-à-vis its ability to engage students successfully as of their initial visit.*

The ethnographic studies on the University of Rochester campus identified their Library as an anchor place for students during the course of the day – “a place they can return to several times a day to rest, study, meet friends, check their email, download assignments, gather sources, and write papers.” (Fister, 2009) The finding reinforces the idea that students have various needs that change during the day, and throughout the semester, which the library should provide for. Mathews identifies seven student “need” states to bear in mind when planning library space and services: academic, social, entertainment and recreational, service, personal, travel, and rejuvenation. (Mathews)

In her article “The glorious study hall: how libraries nurture a life of the mind”, Fister quotes architect Geoffrey Freeman: “‘they want their libraries to feel bigger than they are’. They want to be part of the richness of the tradition of scholarship as well as its expectation of the future. They want to experience a sense of inspiration.” (Fister, 2009)

“Undergraduates frequently say it is the space on campus most conducive to scholarly pursuits ... There is something about the library as a place and as a cultural institution that makes it different from other ‘third places’ such as coffee houses, bars, and community centers where people gather to socialize and develop a sense of community.” (Fister, 2009)

While they spend time (sometimes a lot of it!) in the Library researching, studying, reading and/or writing, students seem to be searching for a bigger context for their learning – some sort of “meaning” perhaps.

In designing Library space, one objective should therefore be to provide students with “a sense of transcendence, giving them a sense of personal belonging, of being at home but also being in a place that matters and will continue to matter to them. The library designed for learning, which combines domestic comfort and informality where students feel at home in the world of knowledge is also a space where the individual can feel a connection to great ideas ... Students tend to feel that traditional library spaces were preferable to modern ones.” (Fister, 2009)

Maintaining some sense of tradition that students enjoy while still moving forward to meet the needs of today, and a more technology dependent time, can be a difficult balancing act. Students' need for connection and inspiration however is something to bear in mind.

Libraries are "some of the most beautiful, uplifting, and noble spaces on campus ... such spaces served and still serve symbolically to reinforce the spirit of learning and to imbue the knowledge-interaction experience with a powerful sense of importance." (Campbell, 20)

**RECOMMENDATION:66**

*That everything possible be done to make the University Library's physical environment as welcoming, safe and comfortable as possible.*

**RECOMMENDATION:67**

*Review the current environment of the University Library with respect to the seven student need states identified above, ascertain that all of them are being met, and ensure that the physical facilities, study spaces, and equipment available provides for the diversity of student needs.*

**RECOMMENDATION:68**

*That some thought be given to that sense of transcendence that students seem to seek in the planning and design of space in the University Library.*

### **2.4.3 The Library as Learning Space**

Unless they are taking part in a class that is occurring in the Library building, students are "intentional learners" when there. It is "one of the chief places on campus where students take responsibility for and control over their own learning." (Bennett, 194) "Intentional learning" is being actively engaged.

Would altering the campus perspective to incorporate a focus on this "intentional" aspect of student learning while in the Library have an influence on how the Library is currently perceived, laid out, furnished, utilized and/or staffed? Would it change what services are provided and, if so, how?

**RECOMMENDATION:69**

*Explore the answers to these questions in various forums and with various stakeholder groups on the campus.*

"As partners in supporting the activities of learning, libraries are drawn to assess what happens in their spaces, with their facilities, and as a result of their staff's engagement. These seem to offer a basis of assessment efforts about library space." (Nitecki, 63)

**RECOMMENDATION:70**

*That the Library's role in promoting "intentional learning" form the basis for any assessment conducted with respect to the utilization of space.*

The motto of the building that houses the University Library is "I am still learning".

**RECOMMENDATION:71**

*Explore ways that the University Library can use this motto – maybe in “openings”/ “unveilings”/ announcements; or perhaps, in mission or marketing.*

### 2.4.3.1 Information and Learning Commons

On many campuses, portions of existing library facilities and/or new space is being used to create “information commons” (IC) or “learning commons” (LC) with a view to supporting “learning by integrating technology, content, and services in physical space.” (Lippincott, 14)

These central resource areas are “physical facilities specifically designed to organize workspace and service delivery ... The general underlying philosophy ... ‘is to support self directed student learning, facilitate the development of students’ potential, advance students’ development of knowledge, and serve as a locus of community for students.’” (Orgeron)

There is a lot of variation in these facilities and it appears there is a continuum from an “information” to a “learning” commons depending on the degree of collaboration achieved. The advice to institutions considering the creation of a commons is to have a clear purpose and mission for the area as well as an understanding of the need for flexibility as the commons evolves. (Lippincott, 9)

In my opinion, the University Library is already an information commons. Below are five descriptions of information and learning commons. The elements of each description that already exist in the University Library are double underlined. The next section of the report discusses the current situation and possibilities for the future.

- 1) “In its simplest form, the IC is a central location within a library where access to technology and reference service is combined... There are several advantages for students with this type of facility. Students can start the research process; locate, evaluate, and select the information they need; get research or technical assistance; and complete assignments from one location. This integrated access to information and technology, combined with the availability of multimedia tools and staff assistance, eliminates the need for students to go to different locations to prepare assignments or to get help when they need it. In theory, the availability of trained staff for research assistance (e.g., professional librarians) and help with technology questions at the point of service provides students with the guidance they need to achieve academic success.” (MacWhinnie, 244)
- 2) “Designed with the expectation of multi-functionality and multipurpose use, a few of these information commons provide display and presentation spaces where students and others can display their work and where libraries can hold events and programs for the cultural and intellectual benefit of students. The more elaborate of these information commons even have spaces and tools for academic socializing, such as coffee shops, that promote and sustain collaborative work. To distinguish these collaboration-oriented information commons from more traditional, individual-oriented information commons, these spaces are often called learning commons.” (Bodnar, 404)
- 3) Often, “the learning commons houses a range of academic services, often including the writing center, the speech center, technology support, library reference, services for students with

disabilities, subject area tutoring, and first-year student programs. Usually, the commons includes many types of work spaces: soft seating, tables, group study rooms, traditional study carrels, multimedia bays, and more. In this environment, students can work two or three to a computer, debate with their peers in casual lounge settings, collaborate at project tables, and engage with library, technology, or media staff. We begin to realize the full potential of this collection of services when we move beyond simply aggregating them to building functional links amongst them, links that create new possibilities for student learning and institutional effectiveness and efficiencies.” (Holmgren, 178)

“We have included a number of services in the learning commons area of the library’s main floor—reference, writing consultants, speaking consultants, assistance with time management and study skills, and support for students with disabilities—any one of which can serve as an initial introduction to library and learning commons services. In addition, the commons provides support for new student orientation and the first-year seminar program, an arrangement initially driven by staffing considerations that has since proven to be a real boon for engaging students with our services. Each section of the seminar has two or three undergraduate students who serve as peer leaders and work closely with the faculty to assist with advising and in the seminar itself. The commons helps faculty identify appropriate undergraduates for this work and provides a peer leader training program in which we highlight services available to students, including those offered by the library and learning commons.” (Holmgren, 184)

- 4) “... many libraries have invested in building ‘learning commons,’ which through ‘deep involvement of academic units in their design and operation ... do not simply support but enact the education mission of the college or university.’ These environments leverage the library’s physical space to bring together diverse campus interests in one place in a way that encourages use of library services such as research consulting or training in the use of specialized tools like GIS. Many of the roles featured in the learning commons also benefit from the library’s unique ability to engage in depth and in person with its users.” (Housewright, 266)
- 5) “So what have we actually been building? Donald Beagle provides a helpful way of distinguishing between the information and the learning commons. The former he defines as ‘a cluster of network access points and associated IT tools situated in the context of physical, digital, human, and social resources organized in support of learning.’ The purpose of the information commons is to support learning—a service mission. By contrast, Beagle defines the learning commons as what happens when the resources of the information commons are ‘organized in collaboration with learning initiatives sponsored by other academic units, or aligned with learning outcomes defined through a cooperative process.’ The learning commons, so defined, depends for its success not only on joint action by support/service units (such as the library and academic computing) but also on the involvement of academic units that establish learning goals for the institution. Properly understood, librarians and academic computing staff cannot alone create a learning commons, as they serve but do not define institutional mission. Other academic units do that and must join librarians and technologists in creating a learning commons. The fundamental difference between the information and the learning commons is that the former supports institutional mission while the latter enacts it ... The key, then, is to replace our typical first question about what should *be* in a space with the less typical question, what should *happen* in the space ... Collaboration among faculty, librarians, and other academic support staff has long been understood to be a key factor in successful information literacy programs and is the distinguishing factor in Beagle’s definition of the learning commons.” (Bennett, 1-3)

### 2.4.3.2 The Current Situation and Future Possibilities

Students at the University of Lethbridge create all the time in the University Library. They currently have an “information commons” in its simplest form in their University Library and have had since the building opened.

They enjoy computer workstations in the Library that provide them with access to productivity software as well as electronic information resources. They have print resources located around them and there is reference service available via the Information and Research Assistance Desk (IRAD) as well as help with technology questions. Writing Services is readily available as is printing.

There is space available for group as well as individual study. Space for students to use technology in small groups may be lacking but the group study rooms can, and are, utilized in this fashion. Some, not all of the furniture is mobile. The chairs associated with equipped carrels move easily and are often relocated and found clustered around carrels with computer equipment. There are also extra chairs with wheels to provide some additional flexibility.

Recently, the technical expertise to answer questions previously better handled in the IT computer labs has become more readily available and for longer hours. Computer equipment at the University is comparable between Information Technology and the University Library and there is a mechanism in place to ensure that it is continually upgraded. This is a major benefit. In fact, disparities with respect to computer equipment and software is one of the infrastructure issues often cited as a major challenge to creating an information commons elsewhere. For example, the University of Michigan spent a year working out a solution to the issues of “disparity in the two levels of computer equipment in their Media Union facility.” (MacWhinnie, 252)

In terms of display, the products of some Womens’ Studies classes have been successfully displayed in the entry area of the Library. Additional, public, display space throughout the building could likely be provided. It would need to be promoted to faculty and somehow coordinated, but it would be an excellent way in which to enhance the learning commons aspects of the current space.

Media services is limited. Administered separately but housed in the Library is the CRDC. It could supply media training and/or expertise if their service mandate was expanded to include students as well as faculty.

Lacking to some extent outside of the Faculty of Education Curriculum Laboratory area or the Prentice Institute, is integrated classroom and/or programming space. L950 exists but it is relatively specialized space and often unavailable.

Although there are many aspects of the present facility that currently act in a information/learning commons sort of way, there is no joint vision and/or cooperative mission with respect to the units that co-exist within the Library building.

In other learning commons, “Librarians and other support specialists are working as peers on this single enterprise. This level of cooperation between services is not only bridging the physical separations



between service units on campus, but also eliminating the service isolation that formerly existed between the units.” (Orgeron)

In some locations the learning commons is the home of Peer Counseling services. “For example, at Dartmouth College the library reference staff, information technology service staff, and writing center ... have developed a program in which they jointly provide intensive training to a group of students who serve as peer tutors for locating information (library) resources, using technology, and improving writing for course assignments. Normally, these three functions are separate, but students’ needs often cross administrative boundaries. The students advertise their services by making brief presentations in writing-intensive classes and scheduling appointments in a library tutoring center.” (Lippincott, 7) Graduate students, intensively trained in multimedia creation, are also employed in their learning commons.

Could relevant units on the University of Lethbridge campus function more collaboratively in order to create a more elaborate and enhanced learning commons for students?

This question would be worth exploring and is the basis for the following three recommendations.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:72**

*Utilize the information and findings associated with Recommendation 69 to 71 to develop a vision and mission for the Library as learning commons.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:73**

*Explore the possibilities of a more collaborative working relationship between the units that currently exist within the Library and what that could mean vis-à-vis better student service.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:74**

*Explore what other services might be effectively integrated into the Library to provide enhanced service to first year students in particular.*

### **2.4.4 The University Library as Virtual Entity**

“For most people, including academicians, the library—in its most basic function as a source of information – has become overwhelmingly a virtual destination.” (Campbell, 20)

Many of the Library’s resources are accessed online. Because the virtual presence of the Library may be less intimidating to some (Slipigni Connaway, Radford, & Williams, 2009) and the only way they use it, the virtual presence of the University Library must be considered equally as important as its physical presence.

A recent October 2010 EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) study indicates that “more than 94% [of students] reported using their institution’s library website for school, work, or recreation, and more than a third of respondents use it several times a week or more often.” (Smith & Caruso, 4)

This is an interesting finding in light of studies conducted by OCLC in 2005 and 2007 that indicated that use of a library website “was the only online activity that *declined* among those familiar with and having access to the internet.” (Hill, 39)

Most academic library websites are a great deal more complex than Google’s single search box and some students find them overwhelming to navigate. (Vondracek, 289) There are products like Serials Solution’s Summons or EBSCO Discovery that attempt to emulate a Google like interface for the online databases and serials provided by libraries. (Fitzpatrick)

Given the results of the research on students’ information seeking behaviours reviewed earlier, one has to wonder if it would help or hinder students in completing assignments to have a more Google like search interface on the Library’s website giving them additional results?

There is confusion in the minds of many about what is freely available via the Internet and what is not. It is interesting to note the wording of a sample action to meet the strategic direction of “Enhancing the Student Experience” on page 13 of the University’s [Strategic Plan 2009-2013](#); that is, “Continue to innovate and expand student use of computer technology and the Internet to access information” (13). Is this truly what is meant by this particular statement? If so, how does it relate to students’ use of scholarly resources for course work (if deemed important)? Is it possible that the findings of the 2005 and 2007 OCLC studies are indicative of students using the Library’s website without really understanding that they are? This seems plausible given the results of the ECAR study cited above.

Many students are unaware of the Library’s website and what can be found using it and studies elsewhere confirm that this is not uncommon. (Vondracek, 293) The need for additional Library marketing and promotions (useful, but limited) is covered later. Promotion by faculty (limited, but useful) was covered earlier.

Although the recent survey by Information Technology provides some insight into the student use of the University of Lethbridge Library’s website it would be useful to have additional information re the local situation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:75**

*That everything possible be done to improve and enhance the student and faculty experience of the University Library’s virtual presence.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:76**

*To provide virtual, 24/7, services as feasible and to ensure that those services are as simple and straightforward as possible to access and use.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:77**

*Ensure that service transactions that occur virtually have the same expectation levels vis-à-vis customer service as those that occur in person or via the telephone.*

## 2.4.5 Accepting and Embracing Diversity

Diversity is an inescapable reality in our world. Co-operation, mutual aid, and reciprocity in nature unify the diversity of the natural world. Human beings have much to learn from nature.

At DEEP schools controversial topics such as diversity are generally addressed “head on by creating opportunities for issues and differences to be vetted, understood, and managed. Faculty leaders and senior administrators often take the lead in such dialogues to keep differences from festering and paralyzing institutional functions. When done well, public conversations strengthen academic values and remind colleagues of their responsibilities to encourage and model reasoned discourse about complicated matters and differences of opinion.” (Kuh et al, 2005, 50)

One of the statements in the fundamental principle of “Commitment to Society” section of the University’s Strategic Plan 2009-2013 is: “We promote diversity and ensure equal opportunity for participants” (7) and a strategic priority is to “Promote and enhance diversity within the University.” (13)

The literature on student retention identifies exposure to diversity as “a positive contribution to the social and intellectual development of all college students.” (Boydan, Bonham & Tafari, 59) and that “in terms of educational outcomes, an institutional emphasis on ‘diversity’ issues has widespread beneficial effects.” (Astin)

It is encouraging to note the efforts of the Gender and Diversity Caucus to create a week in early March devoted to exploring various issues relating to diversity. Should a “Diversity” week become an annual event on the campus, it would provide an obvious timeframe for the Library to host some of the diversity related activities suggested in this section. If this week does not become an annual event, then the Library might wish to take the lead on campus in hosting a series of events with diversity as their theme.

“There is a clearly established link between the diversity of an institution's student body and the likelihood of a student's engaging in diversity experiences like interacting with peers of different races, national origins, cultures, values, and political orientations and taking courses focusing on racial, cultural, or gender issues. But we are only just beginning to understand the real effects of participating in diversity experiences - especially on cognitive growth during college - and what causes openness to diversity in the first place .... Overall, we found that a number of different diversity experiences appear to positively influence growth in critical thinking during college. ... Exposure to people, ideas, and perspectives that challenge ... assumed (and often dualistic) views of the world may help ... develop more complex and critical modes of reasoning.

But we also found that the impact of diversity experiences is complicated. Different experiences affected two- and four-year college students and various racial subgroups (such as, white men, women of color) in different ways.” (Pascarella, 25)

### 2.4.5.1 The University Library and Diversity

In an article entitled “Race & Place” describing the difference location makes in terms of public library services, the author writes: “Rules that unintentionally compound and redouble social exclusion, economic isolation, and, inevitably, race and class lines, abound in libraries. There is no indemnity.” (Hall, 33)

Although directed to public libraries it would be beneficial for academic libraries to also consider if it applies to them; and, if so, to try and alleviate discrepancy.

The following six quotations provide the context for recommendations 78 to 83 in this section of the report.

“Diversity is not just a celebration of difference but ... implies a desire to advance equity and equality. Diversity is an important factor to consider when making decisions about library staff, designing facilities, and developing library services.” (Elteto, Jackson & Lim, 330)

“The marriage of population trends and evidence from recent library reports suggests that more libraries – school, public, and academic alike – are challenged to design services, provide access to information resources, and employ technologies that are increasingly sensitive to linguistic isolation and multilingualism.” (Welburn & Welburn, 12)

“The study performance of minority group students is related to how marginalized they feel within the institution ... efforts to ‘legitimate’ and support students are thus linked to study success, and to rates of retention .... Students from diverse backgrounds bring to their studies a range of perspectives and backgrounds that provides a richness not only for the curriculum, but for campus life in general ... it is important to offer a broad experience, and students with differing perspectives and views on issues and topics assist in this process.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 4)

“Libraries will benefit from carefully examining research on cultural diversity and student development, giving further thought to the cultural purposes libraries offer diverse communities of students. As schools accept more transfer, returning or nontraditional, and culturally and linguistically diverse students, libraries will need to strengthen their expression of independent and self-directed learning opportunities as a way of enabling students to achieve the experiences they hoped to have in college. No matter what is taught in classrooms, no matter what vicissitudes are experienced by students in their academic and personal lives, there is always a campus library to pursue ideas without interference.” (Welburn, 359)

“Institutional responses that deliver on a promise of promoting stronger hetero-ethnic and cross cultural engagement among students from diverse backgrounds are more likely to improve the overall campus climate and increase student persistence and success over those that try to wash out differences. College and university libraries must seek to help erase prior educational inequities among students by creating opportunities for synergy between knowledge, students, and learning opportunities that are mindful of cultural and cognitive differences.” (Welburn, 361)

“There is good reason for academic librarians to identify and consider the unique needs of nontraditional students to ensure that academic libraries are a welcoming place for all students. Designing diversity initiatives with multicultural and nontraditional students in mind is key to bridging the various academic and research needs of today’s students.” (Switzer, 281)

**RECOMMENDATION:78**

*That the Library and its staff adopt the goal of making as many of the diverse and minority members of the student body and faculty feel as welcome and supported as possible.*

**RECOMMENDATION:79**

*Find ways to recognize and celebrate the diversity that exists on the campus and make every effort to incorporate elements of that diversity into the environment of the Library.*

**RECOMMENDATION:80**

*If not already in place, provide multilingual functionality on all public computers in the Library in order to provide for the display of web pages, etc. in various languages such as Chinese, Arabic, etc.*

**RECOMMENDATION:81**

*Explore the library literature to determine how all types of libraries are encouraging and supporting the acceptance of diversity. Adopt and copy anything that seems feasible, adapting as necessary to the academic environment.*

**RECOMMENDATION:82**

*Incorporate diversity initiatives throughout the year not just during Native Awareness, Diversity and other weeks that are set apart for the purpose of acknowledging certain themes.*

**RECOMMENDATION:83**

*Utilize diversity initiatives as a means to enhance partnerships and collaboration on campus; that is, reach out to and partner with minority student programs on campus such as the International Centre for Students, the Native Student Advisors Office, etc.*

A few of the ideas gleaned from the literature and/or that come to mind to celebrate diversity include:

***Book Clubs for Specific Student Groups***

“This reading group chooses fiction, short stories, and nonfiction authored by African-American women about the lives and experiences of African-American women. This type of club has helped make the library more accessible to students ... Involvement with students in the smaller, more relaxed atmosphere that a book club provides has led to closer relationships between students and the library.” (Switzer, 288)

Could this idea be adapted for International students, First Nations students, etc.?

### ***Diversity Cafes***

Model an event after the local, Diversity Café, that takes place every three or four months in the lobby of City Hall. It is an informal get together for anyone interested in meeting a diversity of people for casual conversation.

### ***Diversify the Library Staff***

#### **RECOMMENDATION:84**

*Consider a program of hiring that increases and encourages visible diversity amongst the Library's staff. This may be more easily accomplished amongst the student staff.*

The University adopted a Diversity Initiative a few years ago. Has it made a noticeable difference?

Hiring, however, is only an initial step. Many Libraries, like other organizations, also need to bear in mind that staff members of visible minorities are often not treated like their colleagues and this too needs acknowledgement and consideration.

“While recruiting for diversity is a major problem and is the initial step, it has become increasingly obvious that our organizations are not nurturing and supportive organizations ... Until our organizations change, we cannot be successfully diverse ... Are there things that academic libraries can do to attract a broader spectrum of personnel? How do we continuously and consciously address our organizational hostility?” (Stoffle et al, 373)

If culture is an issue for staff who are members of a minority, one can only imagine how minority students may feel?

### ***Diversity Training for Staff***

“Staff also play a vital [role] in fostering the first-year success of underrepresented minority students. It is important that staff have professional development opportunities that focus on learning how to help first-year students set high expectations and become comfortable with their differences and on becoming adept at handling conflicts that inevitable arise among human beings in general, and particularly among people from different ethnic cultural, and racial backgrounds. Staff members can support first-year students, and especially minority students, in their professional capacities as admissions counsellors, academic advisors, tutors, health professionals, librarians, security staff, and student activities coordinators. Perhaps equally important, staff members have regular opportunities to be supportive of these students on a personal level, expressing their interest in the student's academic progress, co-curricular and career interests, and general well-being. (Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 132)

Library staff are urged to “become proficient at cultural appraisal and more sensitive to cultural differences.” (Switzer, 283)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:85**

*Encourage and reward staff participation in any diversity training that might be undertaken at the campus level and/or provide this sort of training specifically for the Library staff members.*

With the local emphasis on First Nations people, there is a particular need for specific training in order to ensure that all non-First Nations staff members are oriented to the concerns and issues of this particular campus community. (Tippeconnic, Lowe & McClellan, 52)

### **RECOMMENDATION:86**

*Provide training to ensure that all staff members become culturally aware of First Nations peoples.*

#### ***Enhanced Web Pages***

In conjunction with campus events that include recognition of diversity (or other themes), and in addition to the existing display program, create informational pages linked to the Library's website that celebrate such themes. These pages could "offer an array of links to library resources such as relevant books and journal articles on the particular subject, and pertinent, authoritative Web sites." (Switzer, 287).

#### ***Human Library Project***

At the upcoming American Libraries Association in June 2011 there will be a Human Library event.

"Volunteers will serve as 'human books' and help attendees better understand people of different backgrounds and cultures. 'Human books' are 'checked out' for one-on-one, respectful conversations. This unique opportunity allows volunteers to raise awareness of the biases and prejudices that participants have themselves or hold against others. The program ultimately promotes appreciation for differences in background and culture.

The Human Library ([www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)) is an outgrowth of a Danish anti-violence campaign. Since 2000, the movement has brought together people of different backgrounds to have meaningful dialogues, comprehend differences and seek common cause. Human Library programs have been hosted around the world, including Iceland, Australia, England, Brazil, Japan and the United States." (Amundsen, 2011)

The Human Library project could be adapted to feature other things besides diversity that students find of interest; for example, they might be interested in checking out individuals working in various disciplines, careers, etc.

#### ***Screensaver, Display Program and Other Seasonal Signage***

Celebrate diversity themes via these programs and increase the cultural, ethnic and religious sensitivity of them by recognizing the various holidays, festivals, etc. of the minority segments of the university community as well as those of the predominant culture/religion.

Produce an annual display near the beginning of the Fall semester that recognizes the diversity within the student population and acknowledges the benefits that such diversity brings to the campus.

Challenge stereotypes and inspire open dialog about diversity via such means as hosting displays or exhibits "that could spark intellectual debate relative to the treatment of minorities on and off campus" (Switzer, 285)

### ***Special Support Programs***

Many libraries collaborate with particular offices on campus to create specialized information literacy instructional programs for special subsets of the student population. These are also mentioned elsewhere in the report.



## 2.5 Communication

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“Students who experience the campus as a collective, coherent learning environment that expresses cultural and developmental empathy and support are more likely to positively engage.” (Keeling et al, 16)

Students perceive the University as one entity, not a series of standalone units, and when it does not function as a whole, it confuses and is off-putting to them. Many individuals working on the campus lack more than a general awareness of what other units offer.

“Many colleges provide an array of disconnected services, offered by committed people who too often do not talk with one another. Moreover, too often, even college staff and faculty do not fully understand the college’s resources, but novice students are expected to navigate the maze and figure it all out. Better communication is one step toward improvement. A second step would be developing strategies to integrate a variety of academic and support services. A third step would be designing educational experiences so that new students cannot escape involvement in academic and support services that are critical to their success.” (SENSE, 15)

Better orientation to a broader range of campus services for any new employee hired to work directly with students might be in order and is in keeping with the University’s strategic priority: “Continue to encourage academic and administrative units to work together to enhance the student experience.” (13)

### 2.5.1 An Example of Library Disconnect

In the January 19, 2011 issue of the Lethbridge Herald there was a short article on the issue of dropping out and brief, preliminary, information re a new Foundations for Success report by three colleges in Ontario. One of those colleges was Seneca.

Out of curiosity, and hoping to learn more, visited their website at <http://www.senecac.on.ca/> and searched for Foundations for Success. That search yielded a number of retention/success related webpages some of which are geared towards First Peoples, First Year, First Generation, Mature and other more vulnerable subsets of their student population. It appears that a lot of time and effort has gone into creating retention strategies at this campus.

None of the pages, however, made any reference to the library on their campus. It was as if it did not exist. I went looking for it.

Seneca Libraries has an attractive website, a selection of tutorials including one on research, a collection with a lot of “First Peoples” resources, citation information, and assorted other useful tools and information for student use. What struck me, however, was how disconnected the library on this campus was from the College’s obvious retention efforts.

By not linking or referring to the library's website, the department tasked with addressing retention, Seneca Libraries, and any student who consult those retention related web pages, missed out and efforts were duplicated. For example, the retention web pages for First Peoples students makes mention of books and other resources available to them in specific offices without any reference to materials in the Library's collections – of which there appears to be many.

How would any student know where the Library "fits" on this campus?

With Seneca in mind, went looking for an institution that may have done a better job of integrating the library into their retention efforts. The West Virginia University Student Affairs Office of Retention and Research at [http://retention.wvu.edu/academic\\_resource\\_centers](http://retention.wvu.edu/academic_resource_centers) offers a better example. At least their pages refer to the Libraries on the campus.

A slightly deeper examination, however, reveals that in the Study Guides and Strategies pages accessed from the retention website it is all about searching for information on the Internet and there does not appear to be any reference to the academic libraries on their campus. There is, however at <http://www.studygs.net/research.htm>, a referral to the local (public) library!

If one visits their Library's site at <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/> it becomes apparent that they have a number of subject related research guides some of which are custom made for particular classes.

My guess is that, unfortunately, these two examples of "library disconnect" are not unusual and it "speaks" to some of the issues discussed previously.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:87**

*Be vigilant at checking the web pages of other campus units with a view to advocating for the integration of links to the University Library website whenever applicable and relevant.*

## **2.5.2 Collaboration & Outreach**

The report, Promoting a Culture of Student Success: How Colleges and Universities are Improving Degree Completion, cited on the Recruitment and Retention Integrated Planning webpage makes it clear that, as noted previously, "student retention and timely degree completion are everyone's responsibility and are promoted through effective collaboration among individuals and departments. All of the institutions ... demonstrate effective collaboration from the top of the organizational structure to the bottom: People at many levels support one another and accept the premise that *student success is part of their jobs.*" (Bradley, 11)

Working collaboratively requires "boundary spanning" which implies mutual support for "the missions and goals of the collaborating partners, allows for the establishment of a network of colleagues, [and] educates those involved on the programs, services, and goals of other units." (Weiner, 9)

As noted previously, students view the campus as one entity and expect to experience it that way even if the individuals working for the University have a tendency not to. To achieve the “collective, coherent learning environment” a campus needs to promote optimal student engagement requires a shift in consciousness and collaborative emphasis within the Library as well as elsewhere on the campus.

### 2.5.2.1 Opportunities for the University Library

“Every campus has its particular priorities and opportunities” and the library staff “will want to act when those opportunities present themselves.” (O’English, 144) More and more, “librarians are reaching beyond their traditional roles to form collaborative relationships with others on campus.” (Hisle, 172)

Given its broad, campus wide, service mandate, the Library must be a “boundary spanning” unit and its staff proactive relationship builders on the campus for the Library to be as effective as it might be.

“As a boundary spanning unit, the library should interact with and have an effect on the institution as a whole. At colleges that had high faculty perceptions of library service, more librarians were involved in boundary spanning.” (Weiner, 9)

Many academic libraries have experimented with outreach and “satellite” services in multicultural centers, residences, computer labs, and other student “hang outs” as well as embedding library staff in particular programs, departments, and/or research centers on their campuses. All of these are collaborative experiments involving negotiation with other units or areas on campus.

Sometimes “collaboration can generate new and even unexpected requests for library programming and services” and “allows librarians to effectively and dynamically reach more students” (Love, 8) as well as offering opportunities for less formal interactions with students and the possibility of mentoring relationships. (Aguilar and Keating, 25)

“Through embedding librarians or other structured collaborations with departments or research groups, the library can ‘extensively [integrate] scholarly resources and expertise on how to locate and apply them’ into the teaching, learning, and research processes according to the specific needs and priorities of its constituents ... Some libraries have also found ways to apply their expertise in a targeted fashion to address the changing needs of campus administrative entities and research centers ... By recognizing the great diversity in the needs of various campus constituencies and by developing boutique services in collaboration with these constituencies that address their unique priorities, the library can valuably complement network-level services and integrate itself even more deeply into the scholarly life of the campus.” (Housewright, 267)

### 2.5.2.2 Making it Happen – Staffing Considerations

To promote collaborative initiatives, some academic libraries have moved to assigning programmatic as well as discipline-based liaison assignments to their professional staff with a commitment that this new “liaison connection ... be included in workload and annual review considerations and continued as long as it is productive.” (O’English, 145)

Working collaboratively takes assertiveness, time, energy and patience. It needs to be factored into workload. Turnover and other issues means that issues may well have to be re-visited and/or begun again as personnel or priorities change in assigned units. “This is one more reason why outreach relationships need to be represented in job descriptions, workflow, and annual goals so that the time spent nurturing partner relations is valued as it should be and understood as an ongoing process and project.” (O’English, 147)

Consideration of a more programmatic, as opposed to a purely subject oriented assignment model, appears to be under discussion at the University Library. It offers several advantages in terms of fostering additional, on-campus, collaboration. It could also prove useful in addressing one of the major challenges facing libraries everywhere; that is, a general lack of awareness amongst non-library staff (as well as students) about Library resources and services.

### **RECOMMENDATION:88**

*That the Library and its staff remain vigilant to collaborative opportunities and that they proactively seek out possibilities on an ongoing and priority basis.*

Below is a list of ideas (many of them not new) re units on campus that the Library might effectively partner with to enhance services for student success. Occasionally specific recommendations are given in conjunction with particular units.

## **2.5.2.3 Potential Collaborative Partners – On Campus**

### ***Center for the Advancement of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CAETL)***

It is encouraging to see a link to the Library on the CAETL website and for there to be mention of the resources available in the Library’s collection.

This is a unit that might benefit from “boutique” services. For instance, is it possible to expand the Library’s role in the bibliographies that are included in the CAETL newsletter? Can this work also be posted to the web?

Another possibility, mentioned previously, is to create and maintain an annotated bibliography and/or “tips list” of useful teaching tricks and best practice descriptions for faculty. These could be gleaned from the literature of higher education and posted to the University’s website for general use and/or the University might “piggy-back” on the work of other institutions.

On the CAETL website currently, there does not appear to be anything specific to the issue of retention and/or teaching first year students. This might be another productive topic for a collaborative venture.

An example of the sort of information posted for faculty use elsewhere is available at:

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/studretn.htm>

### ***Information Technology (IT) and Curriculum Re-Development Centre (CRDC)***

Many believe that it is impossible for the Library and IT to work in isolation of one another and some academic libraries have adopted a policy of “aggressive collaboration with information technology” meaning that they foster a spirit of collaboration and actively seek out opportunities to work with their IT departments. (Hisle, 172)

Potential collaborations with IT and the CRDC at the University of Lethbridge could be very productive and recommendations elsewhere in the report include some that advocate collaborative explorations with these two units.

What follows are examples of other collaborative ventures that have been undertaken elsewhere by academic libraries and comparable units on their campus.

- First year student library orientations within course management systems
- Videos re plagiarism and academic integrity
- Copyright initiatives for faculty
- Presentations re social networking technologies
- Information literacy courses
- Specialized tutorials including one on the Library vs. Google
- Credit course modules combining “library research skills, instructional technology, and independent cross-disciplinary study” (Oldham)

### ***International Centre for Students***

On many campuses the library is “actively committed to providing outreach services to ... students ... at their point of need” by taking “librarians directly to students” (Aguilar, 14-5) in the hope of making library services more accessible and less overwhelming.

Some advocate calling these satellite locations “Campus Research Service Centers or something more appropriate or fetching for your campus” instead of library services and giving “them an instantly recognizable logo ... Use the word ‘library’ only to direct users to the Library when they need a book to satisfy their information needs.” (Racine, 35)

In recent years, a number of libraries have worked at developing extensive outreach and/or satellite programs to minority students via collaborative relationships with the cultural centers and other specialized units on their campus. Are there areas on the University of Lethbridge campus that international or First Nations students tend to “hang out” that should be explored for “satellite” or other services?

### ***Writing Centre***

Again, it is encouraging to see the Library’s relevant web pages linked on the website for the Writing Centre. On other campuses there have been collaborative efforts to create integrated modules combining Writing and Library expertise. (Oldham)

It does appear that collaboration with this unit could be strengthened. According to a September 2010 Legend article by Erica Lind there was an Academic English for International Graduate Students course held during the summer by the Writing Centre. It was a pilot project. (NOTE: Judging from advertisements it appears that this course is being offered again this summer.)

The article describes course content involving citation styles and writing literature reviews as well as other topics. Was the Library asked to collaborate on this course? If not, it should seek to collaborate in any comparable courses held in the future. It might also be useful to learn why Writing Centre staff never thought to contact the Library when it created this course.

### ***Particular Disciplines and/or Courses***

Many academic libraries have taken advantage of the disciplinary expertise available on their campuses and worked with the faculty responsible for a particular course to create assignments that involve graphic design, marketing/promotional plans (Dubicki), and so forth required by the library. Staff at the Killam Library at Dalhousie University, for instance, used a group of fourth year Sociology and Social Anthropology students to conduct four user observation studies during the 2009-10 academic year. (Bedwell)

There are student benefits in such endeavours as well as benefits for the library. They get “real world” experience and the Library gets useful results. Many projects benefit from having a student, versus library, perspective.

### ***Pronghorn Athletics***

Washington State University Libraries created an ongoing, mutually beneficial, partnership with their Athletics Department.

“Library instruction and liaison relationships, the libraries’ presence at game day events, the involvement of the libraries’ development director, and a multi-part advertising campaign tied to the football season have all brought positive outcomes. Results have included an increased library presence for student athletes, as well as an increase in awareness and “friend-raising” development activities in the larger campus and alumni community.” (O’English, 143)

It appears from the Recruitment and Retention website that Pronghorn Athletics may well be a focus of some retention efforts. To my knowledge a partnership with Pronghorn Athletics at the University of Lethbridge would be a new venture.

### ***Registrar’s Office and Student Services***

Several potential areas for dialogue and collaboration with the Registrar’s Office and/or one of its sub-units come to mind.

- ***Materials and Publications Produced by Recruitment***

Communication with new and perspective students is the purview of Recruitment.

Research suggests that “Aesthetically pleasing and well-equipped libraries contribute to helping student select a college or university and, later, in influencing their decision to stay at that institution.” (Dugan, 122) The library ranked second in terms of facilities important in the selection decision process with only those facilities for students’ majors ranking higher. Libraries were ranked ahead of technology facilities, the student union center, and even recreational facilities (Michigan Academic Library Council 2007, 2).”

Is the University Library marketed as effectively as possible in recruiting and retention efforts at the University of Lethbridge? It does not appear so.

Take Viewbook as an example. It is a recruitment publication available from the University’s website. There is exactly one mention of the University Library in that publication on the “At a Glance” page. The Library is listed as one of several “Facilities” along with the CCBN, the Prentice Institute, On-campus housing, the Art Collection, the Community Sports Stadium, the Center for Socially Responsible Marketing and the 1<sup>st</sup> Choice Community Sports and Wellness Centre.

Is there not a more meaningful mention of the University Library and its services that could be made? The Library has a lot to offer students in terms of learning materials, study space, and support services.

### **RECOMMENDATION:89**

*Review all documentation related to recruitment and/or produced for new students with a view to understanding what has been shared with prospective and new students about the Library. Work with the Registrar’s Office Recruitment unit to enhance the profile of the Library within those materials.*

Note: There is the capability of inserting Quick Response (QR) codes into Viewbook and perhaps elsewhere. These codes could provide a useful means to increase library related content.

- **Early Communication**

“Students often have limited opportunities to communicate with staff, and many students, particularly from non-traditional backgrounds, lack confidence to approach staff for information, advice and guidance. Therefore, mechanisms that increase communication, and thus understanding, between students and staff, can improve engagement.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 177)

Usually there is an abundance of information that reaches the student prior to their arrival on campus either electronically or via the mail. What, if any, information on the Library and its services is distributed to new University of Lethbridge students? Is it comparable to the information in Viewbook?

It would be useful for new students to know at least the following about the Library before they arrive: the url for the website and an invitation to check it out; mention of the Information Research and Assistance Desk service; pictures of the facility; an indication of what they can find in terms of resources, equipment and study facilities; a link to subject or course specific web pages and/or subject indexes; and maybe, a list of subject specialists.

This would be one means of enabling them to start engaging with discipline-specific materials early on. It would also be a useful means to reach out to them, make them feel welcomed and less fearful of the Library, and also provide the opportunity for them to ask any questions they might have.

### **RECOMMENDATION:90**

*Work with the Registrar's Office to determine the feasibility of making contact with new students before their arrival on campus.*

“In the future, libraries can play a more prominent role in reaching key prospective student groups and communicating the ways in which librarians can help students attain academic success. One can imagine assigning incoming students to librarians as ‘research advisors’ and envision librarians innovating ways to provide just-in-time and just-for-you assistance based on students’ enrollment records or individual characteristics. Ideally, librarians will send individual students instructional content relevant to their newly assigned projects proactively, rather than waiting passively to be asked to help ... Such service could target both students of great need and of great potential.” (ACRL, 13)

Apparently, as of September 2010, Drexel began a new “Personal Librarian Program” that assigns each new, incoming, student a personal librarian. (Gianakaris)

- **Mature Students**

Mature age students are often “from low income groups, are first in the family to attend university, and are returning to study after a significant period. Frequently, they lack confidence in themselves, believe they have insufficient knowledge of the system, and feel the higher education system is a mystery ... They lack knowledge about how universities work and also lack confidence in their ability to find out what they need to know to survive.” (Crosling, Thomas & Heagney, 23)

### **RECOMMENDATION:91**

*Work with the Registrar's Office and Student Services to target mature students for library instruction sessions designed with their special needs in mind.*

- **Native Student Advisor and Disabilities Resource Centre**

As with the International Centre for Students, these units would be useful collaborative partners in order to reach the special subset of the student body each of them represents.

As the campus grows, and especially should a physical meeting place become available to First Nations students, the Library should consider offering outreach/satellite services to them.

- **Student Life**

If the Library begins to host fun, social, events they could be done in cooperation with the new, Student Life, unit. As a new unit, and particularly because of their mandate, it would be worthwhile to explore with them how the Library might assist in meeting their objectives.

### ***School of Graduate Studies, Graduate Students' Society, etc.***

“One of the consistent findings in studies of graduate students’ use of the library, its resources, and services, is the students’ lack of awareness of the library’s offerings ... in many cases the students we



spoke to seemed open to receiving assistance from librarians but did not know what—or even if—services were available: ‘I wouldn’t actually know what to ask the librarian, even if I had constant access. I wouldn’t know what that person could offer ... I need an introduction ...’ This lack of understanding of the librarian’s potential helpfulness reinforced our belief that librarians must assertively establish contact with doctoral students and explicitly and frequently explain both the credentials that qualify them to provide assistance to doctoral-level researchers and the range of services they are prepared to offer.” (Fleming-May, 214)

Although the Graduate Students Society has initiated orientation and instruction sessions for their members in the past it should be the University Library that contacts them, and other relevant offices, every semester in order to explore additional ways to reach this group.

### **RECOMMENDATION:92**

*That outreach to graduate students be pro-active and ongoing.*

### ***Referrals and Tutoring Services***

Many individuals frequently interact with students and make referrals to other campus units. Many non-Library staff, like students, are not aware of the assistance and resources that can be had from the Library.

To my knowledge the referral pathway to and from the Library has never been given much thought and it is not particularly well developed. The literature advises institutions aiming to increase retention to devise “proactive early warning and intervention strategies for students with academic deficiencies” (Ewell and Wellman, 9). Once identified, “an integrated approach that addresses non-academic and academic issues” is required and this “necessitates collaboration across campuses to construct a net of awareness and practices to catch even the inconspicuous struggler.” (Alberts)

The Library can assist students with completing assignments, refining topics, conducting research for papers, finding required references, evaluating sources, and so forth. A broader awareness of this amongst staff in campus units that frequently encounter and counsel students could, if properly cultivated and promoted, lead to better, more successful, interventions for some.

It is not clear from the website of Recruitment and Retention Integrated Planning, or from other information on this initiative, where the planned tutoring service will be centered and/or which unit would be responsible for administering it.

Ensuring that there is an understanding of the role that can be played by the Library in assisting students who are referred to this new service is crucial. It would be prudent to determine the best means and route for referrals.

### **RECOMMENDATION:93**

*Think about possible referral routes to and from the Library, consider the pros and cons of each, and determine which, if any, routes are to be preferred.*

**RECOMMENDATION:94**

*Ensure that every unit on campus, including any tutoring service that is created, is aware of Library services and how to make referrals.*

## 2.5.2.4 Potential Collaborative Partners – Off Campus

### *Colleges and High Schools*

Some academic libraries have reached out to local colleges to reach transfer students and to high schools to reach new students with the objective of helping newcomers to the campus “gain the research, information-gathering and analytical skills they need to thrive in a university environment.” (Crum)

### *Public Library*

Some academic libraries have partnered with their local, public, libraries to provide an on-campus leisure reading collection for their students. (Woodward, 90) Was this considered as a means of stocking the newly created leisure reading area for students?

Given the fact that the City of Lethbridge also has an interest in diversity initiatives, this could be a productive topic to explore vis-a-vis collaborative projects and/or programs.

It is interesting to note that the University of Lethbridge Bookstore partnered with the Crossings Branch Library and the Lethbridge Children’s Literature Roundtable to present Dave Glaze on March 16 this year.

## 2.5.3 Marketing and Promotions

Many, many students are not aware of the resources and services available to them on campus.

“Colleges offer a wide variety of support services, but students cannot use services if they are unaware of them. In addition, students don’t take advantage of services when they don’t know how to access them, find them to be inconvenient, or feel stigmatized by using them.” (CCCSE 2010, 15)

Students tend to be unaware of all that the library has to offer and many articles in the library literature attest to this fact (Barton; Racine; Vondracek). Most associate the library only with books. Student: “I never even knew that there was someone sitting at the front of the library that wanted you to go over there and interrupt them ... I can just walk into the library and ask them to help me out and I never knew that was available.” (Hernon, 257) And it is not, as noted earlier, just undergraduate students that lack awareness: ““Studies frequently point to students’, graduate and otherwise, lack of awareness of the extent of services provided by academic librarians as an impediment to students’ fully utilizing’ the resources and services of the library available to them.” (Fleming-May, 200)

Lack of awareness is often a finding when focus groups are consulted. In one group “they were unaware that the library offered free online resources. One of these students had recently paid for access to articles and was surprised to learn that he could have obtained them free through our full-text databases.” (Vondracek, 289) Participants in these groups sometimes suggest creating services that already exist or they criticize a library “for not offering services when, in fact, those services were available.” (Gunter, 22)

To overcome the lack of awareness of library services, a common recommendation is for librarians to “take a proactive approach, viewing strategic marketing of their services and resources as critical ... Some of the literature shows librarians searching for ways to effectively market and promote library resources and services ... a successful library is one that informs users about services and convinces them to use them.” (Rhoades & Hartsell, 1-2)

One of the findings in the recent [OCLC Perceptions of Libraries, 2010](#) report was that just 11% of college students have seen an advertisement from their library. “The library needs to advertise its services more.’ This encouragement was echoed many times in the verbatim comments in the survey.” (OCLC, 98)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:95**

*In order to increase awareness of its resources and services, that the marketing strategies listed below be considered for use by the University Library.*

A list of marketing strategies gleaned from the literature and elsewhere follows.

### **2.5.3.1 Stories, Anecdotes, Testimonials, and Word of Mouth**

Why don’t students utilize librarians? This theme was explored in some depth in the “Academic Engagement” section of the report. Briefly re-stated, librarians seem to appear nearly invisible “within the academic worldview of students .... [and] confusion about what librarians do and who and where they are hinders students from asking questions and obtaining the help they need. ... Despite this confusion about the academic role of librarians and caution in approaching them for assistance, the minority of students who had developed a relationship with a librarian reported high levels of satisfaction with the help provided, returned repeatedly for help [with] other assignments, and recommend librarians to their peers.” (Asher, Duke & Green)

It appears that students would use library services more if they were recommended to them by a trusted friend or teacher. (Slipigni Connaway, Radford & Williams, 2009, 7; Laskowski, 318) So, in addition to encouraging faculty to refer their students to the Library or its librarians, is there a way to “leverage students’ positive experiences so that they recommend library services to their peers”? (Asher, Duke & Green)

“Starbucks. The Body Shop. Ebay. These are all companies that built their reputations on the strength of their product and strategic use of word-of-mouth. Satisfied customers became their sales force. Positive word-of-mouth is so simple, basic, and powerful that it’s hard to imagine any company

prospering without it. And you can probably think of more than a few ventures ...that have suffered from negative word of mouth.” (Barber, 37)

Testimonial marketing is everywhere. The University uses it and so does the Edmonton Public Library. Storytelling, digital and otherwise, has been the topic of recent workshops and “how-to” publications. Many of the publications consulted mention its potential usefulness in the library world. (Barber & Wallace; Dugan, 122; OCLC 2010, 99; and Rodger being just a few examples)

For University administrators, anecdotal comments and stories are important sources of information. They rely on them to gather information about the state of things on the campus including the library. (Lynch et al, 222) So, why not systematically utilize focus groups and/or other means to gather stories about satisfied, happy, University of Lethbridge Library customers?

Such stories could be used to advertise the Library to other students as well as to illustrate the contributions the Library makes to student success. “Sometimes, telling ‘the story’ of how services impact on individuals (the personal dimension) can be the most convincing way of demonstrating that we are making a difference.” (Everest & Payne, 21)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:96**

*Seek out testimonials from students who regularly utilize the University Library’s various services and explore ways to utilize their stories and recommendations in promotional campaigns and advertising strategies.*

### **2.5.3.2 Focus on Answering the Question: “What can the Library do for me?” Using Language and Means that Resonate with Students**

The best advertisers focus on the benefits of the product and not on the product itself.

Focus on the value and benefits that users can derive from the Library’s services and content and not on the services and content themselves. We need “to humanize the library, to get out into the community and make the library not about the resources and the technology but about us.” (Bell, 2009, 53) Time is one thing that most students could use more of. Emphasize this aspect of library service – a potential time saver.

What else do Students value? Some of the assessment activities discussed earlier might provide useful answers.

### **2.5.3.3 Some Positives That Could Be Used in Marketing**

“Nearly three-fourths of college students have a library card. College students who have been assisted by a librarian are overwhelmingly (90%) satisfied with their experiences with librarians, and eight out of ten agree that librarians add value to their search process.” (OCLC 2010, 60)

“College students recognize the value-add librarians provide to the search process. Three-quarters (78%) who use librarians agree librarians add value to the process and that librarian assistance is available when needed (71%). More college students are very satisfied with information, service and overall experience with librarians than they are with search engines ... Of those who connect to the library Web site, most use the site (80%) and almost all who do so get to success (99%) ... Most who started at a search engine and ended up at a library Web site say they have returned to the site (69%), and 50% have increased their use of the library and/or library Web site. Students who use the library Web site find success.” (OCLC 2010, 56)

*For example:*

*“8 out of 10 college students agree that librarians add value to their search process.”\* Take advantage of IRAD, ask a question, and check it out!*

*When you are not happy with what you’ve found maybe it’s time to Ask –a-Question! 90% of college students assisted by a librarian found what they needed.*

Similar, local, statistics might be more meaningful.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:97**

*Use recent statistics from reports such as the [OCLC Perceptions of Libraries 2010](#) report or local studies re the positive benefits students report about having used library services and incorporate them into screensavers, posters, advertisements in the [Meliorist](#), etc.*

### **2.5.3.4 Use Students for Marketing Outreach and/or for Planning Fun, Social, Events**

“Looking to connect with students when they first arrived on campus, the West Campus Business Library at Texas A&M University ... launched a proactive, unconventional outreach tactic often used by entertainment companies and record labels. The Street Team is a student-led, guerrilla marketing effort modeled after the street teams of the music industry—the ones that show up at community events to pass out flyers and hand out merchandise promoting rock bands ... ‘The most frequently noted comment in our training evaluations is that attendees wish they had known about the library’s resources sooner... Students don’t find their way to the library until they are desperate for answers. Many are intimidated by the library environment and don’t receive adequate help to complete their work.’

Enter the Street Team. Composed of five undergraduates, the Street Team developed a visual identity and began planning ways to engage underclassmen ... ‘Rather than change student behavior ... we want to take advantage of it and communicate in a more informal style. So many students seek out student workers before they ask a librarian. They have less anxiety when they talk to someone who is their peer.’” (Storey)

### 2.5.3.5 Acknowledging Rhythms & Timely Promotions

As noted earlier, students have needs that vary with the time of day and the season. These “need” rhythms should be recognized, considered, and built into any communication strategy devised to reach them. (Mathews, 60)

One creative example of appropriate timing is the November Crunch Time campaign at the University of Texas (UT). A small but relevant promotional item – a “Crunch” candy bar – is attached to advertising promoting “the availability of in-person, drop-by assistance, subject librarian consultation, and the UT Libraries Ask a Librarian IM and email services.” (Willmann)

### 2.5.3.6 Use Front Line, Circulation Staff to Promote Services

“Many studies have proven that the circulation staff is the first and sometimes the only contact patrons have when visiting the library. We miss a lot of opportunities by not encouraging circ staff to promote the library.” (Barber & Wallace, 39)

This strategy has been tried in public libraries with some success in promoting online resources. The focus is on spreading the word amongst their public with the front line circulation staff taking the lead in promotion. Once trained, the staff “felt knowledgeable and empowered” and the campaign “took off”. Incentives were used to motivate the staff as well as make it fun. (Barber & Wallace, 38)

### 2.5.3.7 Other Marketing/Promotional Ideas

Below are thoughts vis-à-vis other potential marketing angles that could be useful in promoting the Library.

#### ***Motivation to Study***

“The ability to understand and use information is essential to life-long learning and is increasingly sought after in the workplace.” (Saunders, 106) “What motivates students to attend university has changed over time. Today one of the biggest motivators is career preparation or career advancement as opposed to scholarship.” (Galt, 28)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:98**

*Explore what role the library and/or information sources play in various careers and utilize this information to market library services and in promotional/educational efforts.*

The following quotations may also be useful in developing this strategy:

“In today’s information-driven workplace, people spend much of their time formulating questions, finding relevant information and drawing conclusions, often working in virtual teams scattered across the globe.” (Resource Shelf)

“Employers in particular expect students to be prepared for the workplace, but only one in four believes that community colleges, colleges, and universities do a ‘good job’ preparing students for the world of work ... (Interestingly, three of the areas employer stakeholders ask higher education to emphasize are

related to the skills libraries have always taught: critical thinking and analytical thinking skills (81% of employers); ability to analyze and solve complex problems (75%); and ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources (68%)” (ACRL, 2010, Values, 27)

### ***Tell Them Where the Sources Come From***

“Many ... often do not realize that the electronic resources that they may access are provided through their campus Library....’In many respects the academic library has become transparent. A growing share of libraries’ costs consists of providing faculty and students with access to scholarly resources through licensing agreements with electronic journals, databases, and other digital resources. While the library incurs significant costs in providing access to these materials, its users are increasingly likely to consider such access as simply a feature of the landscape—a scholarly abundance or retrievable feast that registers in exactly the same terms as other forms of information ubiquitously available through the Internet. Though they may have drawn extensively on digital resources the library has made available, it is increasingly possible for faculty members as well as students to research and write a scholarly article, book, or essay without ... understanding the library’s role in providing information they have obtained.” (ACRL, 2006)

### **RECOMMENDATION:99**

*Create an awareness campaign that attempts to educate the Library’s clientele about the number of resources provided electronically while also educating them about their availability.*

For example:

- *Glad you found those scholarly journal articles for your last paper? Thank the University Library for providing \$---- dollars worth of digital resources for you to use this year.*
- *Project MUSE? One of many sources for scholarly articles provided for you by the University Library.*

Substitute Project MUSE for any of the other databases most popular with students and frequently referred to by faculty and repeat the theme.

### ***Are you getting your money’s worth from your tuition dollars?***

Some libraries have calculated what students pay for library services on their campus per credit hour and use this information to ask: “Are you getting your money’s worth?” (Hernon, 54; Dugan, 14-5)

### ***Targeting Specific Products to Particular Audiences***

Pick and promote one or two multi-disciplinary databases to first year students stressing convenience and ease of use; pick resources with the biggest bang. Promote benefits instead of “the thing” and employ terms users understand. Be brief; speak to the rule not the exception; say it with graphics. (Wisniewski & Fichter, 55)

For example:

*Five articles in 10 minutes! Try --- to find articles on a any topic fast!*

### ***Utilize the Library Catalog to Provide Access to Subject Librarians***

Information on the appropriate subject librarian comes up via a search of the catalog (Varnum).

### ***Take the Message Out of the Library***

Consider expanding the use of the Library's promotional materials to areas outside of the Library; for example, the residences, dining areas, etc. or anywhere that students tend to congregate. (Wisniewski & Fichter, 56)

### ***Snap Shot Day***

"Library Snapshot Day is an event that provides library staff a simple means to show the value of the library by capturing what happens in a single day in all types of libraries, across a state, community or even in a single library. Learn how to implement this event, as well as how to maximize photos, statistics and stories to make the case to decision-makers."

A free webinar was recently advertised via ALAnews. (Finneke) Even if done without the participation of other local libraries this could well yield useful pictorials for various uses.

### ***Give Away E-Books***

Give away free e-books to those with a smartphone and QR code reader.

"Give em a book (even if it's freely available online), and brand it as your business ... Why not copy this idea? Use a QR Code, put up a sign ... and offer a "free" ebook (maybe something legally free from Project Gutenberg). Send the user to a mobile webpage, branded as your library – with a link to the ebook, and some info about your other cool services." (King)



## 2.6 Miscellaneous Topics Not Easily Categorized Elsewhere

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Those topics that were not easily categorized under any of the previous headings have been grouped together in this final section of the report.

### ***2.6.1 Programmatic Assignments and/or New Hires***

Some institutions have hired professional library staff specifically to deal with and focus on first year students and various job titles have been used to describe these positions. Often such assignments focus on outreach to first year students and the programs that support them as well as high school liaison.

“The first-year librarian position is a new phenomenon ... the majority of these positions are in large Research I or II institutions where first-year students can easily get lost in the academic shuffle. Most were created in direct response to campus initiatives around student learning and retention. The positions studied focus on introducing first-year students to the library as a place and on using information literacy competencies to support student learning. Yet, they are also flexible “works in progress” as they strive to be relevant and integrated into the local campus environment. More assessment is needed to determine the long-term effectiveness and impact of the first-year librarian on retention and student learning.” (Hardesty, 106)

### ***2.6.2 Site Visits to DEEP Institutions***

“A time-honored improvement strategy in higher education and other sectors is to identify high-performing organizations, find out what they do well, and adapt these promising practices for use in other settings. For example, some institutions have higher than-predicted graduation rates and student engagement levels (Kuh, in press). Perhaps students at certain colleges and universities use the library more and benefit more than might be predicted, all things being equal. It would be instructive to learn more about these institutions and their libraries.” (Kuh & Gonyea)

It was interesting to find this quotation after thinking the same thing while reading Kuh’s work on DEEP institutions. It is his 2005 book, Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter about DEEP institutions, that is being referred to in the above quotation. Also thought it would make an excellent doctoral thesis topic.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:100**

*Undertake this study (you could hire me to do it!) or, should that not be feasible, at least contact the libraries at DEEP institutions in order to discuss how their library and staff contribute on their campuses to student retention and success.*

## 2.6.3 Student Employees

Studies indicate that on campus employment is beneficial for retention if less than 25 hours per week. (Wilder, 1036)

“Campus work experiences are often educationally enriching as well as a source of income, providing students with substantive leadership and learning opportunities. Another positive side effect of hiring large numbers of students for campus jobs is a strong sense of student ownership of university programs and services.” (Kuh et al, 2005, 47)

In light of the increase in retention associated with on-campus employment a number of institutions have initiated work study programs: “Numerous studies have documented the importance of financial aid for student success, especially for low-income students ... Though there are many differing types of programs, work-study programs appear to be particularly effective for they not only help students pay for college, they also serve to involve students with other members of the institution ... It is for this reason that an increasing number of institutions are employing work-study programs as part of their student success initiatives.” (Tinto & Pusser, 13)

### 2.6.3.1 Student Assistants in the University Library

The University Library has always had a large number of student employees who form an integral part of the Library’s staffing plan and are indispensable to it.

Several institutions have noted that retention and graduation rates for students employed by their library are higher than the general student population and that this has been particularly true for minority students (Dugan, 67; Rushing, 93). It would be useful to know if the retention rate amongst the University Library’s student workers is higher than the University of Lethbridge average.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:101**

*Determine, and continuously monitor, the retention and graduation rates for student employees of the University Library for comparison to the overall graduation rate of the institution.*

There were no studies found that compared the retention rate of students employed by the academic library with other units on campus although this would be an interesting study.

Some of the reasons postulated for higher retention rates amongst students working in academic libraries include: demystifies the library and reduces anxiety; placement in a study related environment; and exposure to materials useful to their academic work. (Wilder, 1037) With respect to the later point, working in the library also exposes students to the variety and abundance of scholarly materials available to them. Many others have no idea of the nature, or the abundance, of such sources.

As evident in the following quotation, social integration also seems to play a role, in why student workers in the library have higher retention rates than average: “A sense of connectivity and belonging

was a recurring theme ... One student explained, 'I feel more connected to other students. It creates a friendlier atmosphere when people [faculty and other students] get to know you by name.' ... As a result of working ... he felt more connected to the students ... It was through his interactions with students and student coworkers that he had made new friends and, essentially, carved out his own social niche. One student best summarized the social integrative aspect of the library as, 'One of the reasons that I wanted to work in the library is to feel a part of, more attached to the university.' He wanted to achieve a sense of belonging and indicated that this was one of the reasons for seeking employment in the library ... All of the students when asked if working in the library made them feel 'more connected or socially integrated with the university,' answered 'yes.'" (Weston, 279)

Student workers in the library may "spend more contact hours with library faculty and staff than with teaching faculty until perhaps their senior year. This contact provides opportunities for librarians to influence the lives of many students and thus makes an understanding of that reality and all its implications imperative." (Rushing, 100)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:102**

*Actively think about the University Library's student workers in terms of retention, raise retention awareness in their direct supervisors as well as other Library staff, explore ways to enrich their work lives, and provide opportunities for them to interact with one another and with library staff.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION:103**

*Continue to sponsor social events for the student workers throughout the year and open the invitation to all staff as a way to encourage greater contact.*

### **2.6.3.2 Increasing Diversity Amongst Library Staff**

If for no other reason than the rate of turnover, it seems easier to achieve the aim of diversifying the Library's staff via the student assistant hiring process rather than that for regular staff.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:104**

*Consider a program of hiring that increases and encourages visible diversity amongst the student staff and encourage social interaction amongst them.*

### **2.6.3.3 Celebrating Success**

In a recent issue of my alma mater's alumni magazine, Dalhousie, there is a story about a former child soldier from Sudan who recently finished a master's degree after receiving a funding from the World University Service of Canada's Student Refugee Program. He attributes a number of individuals at Dalhousie with his success, amongst them library staff. He got a job at the Killam Library on campus and "At graduation, a contingent of librarians whooped and cheered." (Smulders, 7)

My guess is that the University of Lethbridge Library has had comparable cases of student worker success amongst the ranks of our student assistants but that those have been celebrated less publically and not with as much gusto.

**RECOMMENDATION:105**

*Explore ways to publically celebrate the graduation of student workers either in social settings such as an annual convocation luncheon or with some sort of recognition gift.*

### 2.6.3.4 Using the Library's Student Workers as a Source of Information

"Our best resource in discovering the role the academic library on a college campus and how best to reach out to undergraduate students, in general, may be through better understanding of our own library student workers." (Weston, 280)

For example, other libraries have used their student workers as a source of ideas for fun, social events that the library could sponsor.

**RECOMMENDATION:106**

*Utilize to full advantage the insights of the Library's student employees re what students value, need and want from their Library in order to learn more about the University's student body in general and in order to generate relevant ideas.*

#### ***Information Literacy Opportunities***

Many student workers in the Library are approached to answer questions. Currently they are encouraged to refer most of those questions rather than to respond themselves.

With the proliferation of electronic resources, it seems reasonable to assume that student proctors in the Information Technology (IT) computer labs get questions about how to use these sources.

Student workers in the Library, as well as the IT computer labs, would benefit from training in basic information literacy skills and an orientation to Library's collections and services. Such training would provide them, as students, with information useful in their own studies as well as equip them to better answer questions about the Library and/or its resources that they might encounter.

**RECOMMENDATION:107**

*Institute training for all student assistants in the Library (including those recently hired as technology resource personnel) on basic information literacy concepts as well as an overview and orientation to the Library and its resources/services.*

**RECOMMENDATION:108**

*Consult with IT re the experience of the student proctors in the labs and the potential that information literacy and Library related training might have to better equip them to respond to Library related queries encountered in the labs.*

### 2.6.3.5 Potential for Peer Counselling

"Some institutions offer peer mentoring services ... The evidence that peer mentoring and tutoring improves student outcomes is strong." (Zepke & Leach, 51)

Peers have been used as writing assistants (Kuh et al, 2005, 186), research proctors (Marshall, Burns, & Briden, 29) and information counselors/reference assistants ((Rushing & Poole, 99) since it seems many students feel more comfortable approaching them.

“According to the literature, Generation Y students look to their peers for help but have a distrusting attitude toward teachers or authority figures. Since students feel more comfortable approaching a peer, it makes sense to try a tiered approach to reference services. Well-trained student workers can answer basic reference questions to make patrons feel more comfortable about initially approaching the reference desk ... Anecdotally, we have observed that when both a student worker and a librarian are at the desk, student patrons will almost always approach the student worker first.” (Gardner, 413)

As described above, peers have also been used to staff learning commons help desks and the benefits, in addition to them being better received and more easily approached by their peers, is their willingness to work longer hours. (Lippincott, 11)

#### **RECOMMENDATION:109**

*Consider utilizing the Library’s student workers more broadly in peer counselling/mentoring positions.*

## **2.6.4 Textbooks**

Lack of finances is one primary contributor to students dropping out. Textbooks are becoming more and more expensive. If students fail to purchase required texts within a reasonable timeframe they may fall behind and are therefore at a greater risk of dropping out. This is particularly true of students with lower socioeconomic and/or minority status who are already at an increased risk of not continuing. (Tippeconnic Fox, Lowe & McClellan, 25) Often students do not buy the course textbook because they only need to use small sections of it. (Christie, 502)

“As textbook prices continue to rise, more students are turning to their academic libraries with the expectation that the library will have a copy of the required book.’ ... ‘though textbooks are often not considered appropriate for long-term addition to library collections, there is a growing demand from students for access to these materials.’” (Christie, 493-4)

Because it is usually well beyond the Library’s collections budget to purchase all textbooks for all courses, it has been typical for academic libraries to simply state that they did not collect textbooks at all. Although historically this is the case, there is a growing body of library related literature examining the issue of textbooks and some libraries are undertaking initiatives to address it. Some take a lead role on campus with respect to this issue.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:110**

*Take a lead role on campus in addressing the issue of textbook prices and collaborate with other units as required to explore possibilities.*

**RECOMMENDATION:111**

*Explore recent library literature with respect to the provision of textbooks with a view to learning what approaches other academic libraries have undertaken and determine what, if anything, the University Library might do to meet at least some of the textbook needs of students.*

Although not consulted, the following two references might also be useful starting points.

Laskowski, Mary S., "The Textbook Problem: Investigating One Possible Solution," *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services* 31, 3/4 (2007): 161.

Cynthia Hsieh and Rhonelle Runner, "Textbooks, Leisure Reading and the Academic Library," *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services* 29, 2 (2005): 192.

Some of the library initiatives with respect to textbooks encountered in the literature consulted for this project includes:

**2.6.4.1 Open Education Options**

There are new alternative publishers such as "Flat World Publishing and Connexions that encourage faculty to make their textbooks openly accessible by facilitating the collection of sharing of the texts, and then allowing students to access them for free online." (Bell, 2010, Textbook)

**RECOMMENDATION:112**

*Explore the potential of promoting such alternate publishers for use on the campus, understanding that there could be financial implications for the Bookstore.*

**2.6.4.2 Textbooks on Reserve**

Through collaborative ventures with their campus bookstores, and/or via faculty and student donations, a number of libraries have created textbook collections, housed them their Reserve Collections, and made them available via that route. (McDonald, 2010) "At Virginia State University, the library has reserve copies of textbooks 'for basic courses, such as English, History and Psychology.' At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the library 'sponsors a program to place high-cost textbooks on reserve.' ... libraries might do better to focus on using funds, whenever possible, to purchase recommended and optional textbooks, rather than required textbooks, and to make sure that these books are on reserve without waiting for faculty to initiate requests ... Promotion of the course reserves service to faculty as a counter to high textbook costs and encouraging them to place books on reserve and to do so promptly would also serve students faced with purchasing textbooks." (Christie, 504)

In the open ended comment section of an Oregon State University survey, many students viewed the library's course reserve system as "an alternative or supplement to buying books. Many specifically mentioned how course reserves saved them money. One student said, 'It has allowed me to *eat and go to school.*' Another said, 'Without it [reserves], I wouldn't be able to take some classes.' More than half of the students who used course reserves ... felt that the service was very important in supporting their success at the university." (Christie, 502)

### 2.6.4.3 Handouts

In response to the growing number of requests for textbooks, one library created a handout entitled, "Looking for Textbooks?", that referred students to the bookstore." (Imler, 35) Could they not have done better?

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