WHITE PAPER: ROLE OF NIMITZ LIBRARY

The question has been asked, "[W]ith information literally at our fingertips on smartphones and tablets, are libraries still important? Do we still need libraries?"[1] The answer is yes, we now need libraries and librarians more than ever. The future holds new roles for libraries.[2,3] Libraries are changing and adapting to the new information infrastructure and, in an environment where information is superabundant and of varying quality and reputability, the role of the library and librarians are becoming more, not less, significant. Moreover, it is essential to understand not just the universal need for libraries and their evolving roles, which has been well documented, but also the unique role that Nimitz Library plays at the Naval Academy.

Nimitz Library is the heart of academics and the moral and mental aspects of the Naval Academy mission. The library serves unique and irreplaceable roles within the institution:

1.   the collections (regardless of medium),
2.   the facility, and
3.   the staff and the services they provide.

In the absence of any one of the three, the Library as a whole will be badly off kilter and its value seriously degraded.

THE COLLECTION

The collections of a good library are a curated collection of knowledge, tools, and mentored access to the vast quantities of unfiltered information available in the modern environment. Academic libraries are designed to be both beneficial and efficient for students. The collections, both print and electronic, must be properly scoped to meet the unique curricula of the home institution. Indeed, on topics such as the history of naval architecture, U.S. Naval History, and Naval Science there are few other libraries that offer collections equal in depth and quality to those in the Nimitz collection. A good library caters its collection to the needs and identity of the institution. Additionally, at the Naval Academy, the library must provide timely access to materials for professional development and the history of the armed forces, which cannot be replicated through inter-library loans.

To make these collections accessible to midshipmen, the library provides a discovery tool (an online system more sophisticated than a catalog) that includes full-text access to the gamut of digital content as well as those "scoped" collections that are unique to the institution.   As a focused alternative to

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[1] New York Times Opinion Pages, "Room for Debate: Do We Still Need Libraries?" Accessed on 8 Dec 2016: nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/12/27/do-we-still-need-libraries

[2] Association of College and Research Libraries, "New Roles for the Road Ahead," 2015. Accessed on 8 Dec 2016: ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/new_roles_75th.pdf

[3] ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee, "2016 top trends in academic libraries A review of the trends and issues affecting academic libraries in higher education," College & Research Libraries News, June 2016, pp. 274-281. Accessed on 8 Dec 2016: http://crln.acrl.org/content/77/6/274.full.pdf+html.

searching Google and wading through thousands of "hits," the library system provides quick, efficient access to vetted, scholarly, full-text content in print or electronic formats. One of the best features of a modern discovery tool is the ability to quickly narrow a search using relevant criteria; such as, materials written in the last year, materials published in the target language, or to separate books from journals. Lastly, with a discovery tool the library can control "relevance ranking" of hits based on logical criteria as opposed to Google or other standard web tools that sell this feature to the highest bidder, not the "most relevant."

A good and useful academic library also provides access to content published before the dawn of e-books and online resources. Not all of this content has been retrospectively digitized, and many items are not freely available on the web; for example, if one wants to read a New York Times article from the Stock Market Crash of 1929, that article is available online only if the library has a subscription to the source or has purchased that particular content. Otherwise, it is necessary to rely on interlibrary loan, visit another institution, or purchase the item directly from the publisher. Due to the ease of accessing on-line materials through a library's subscriptions (from periodicals to encyclopedias to academic journals), patrons often believe that these resources are both easily available and even free—this is generally not the case.

A library at an institution such as the Naval Academy functions to provide access not only to its own collections, but those of other institutions. Books, manuscripts, and documents of all flavors and types held by a community of academicians constitute a common, even community, resource. Access to substantial research collections at other institutions comes with an understandable price: reciprocity. The Naval Academy must maintain its place as a significant node in the network of libraries, offering access to the unique collections and topical areas that are at the heart of the institution's history and mission, or risk losing access to complementary collections held elsewhere. Currently the library staff facilitates the borrowing of 2,500 books and articles by Nimitz patrons (a number that is likely to increase given current budget pressures) by lending over 3,100 books, articles, and other documents from the Nimitz collection.[4] Processing of requests requires staff members to be knowledgeable of not only the Nimitz collection and capacity to reciprocate, but also the collections and responsiveness of other libraries within the nationwide network. In this way, the library and its staff are a gateway to knowledge in an even more substantial way than might be obvious from the brick and mortar or the paper and glue.

A succinct statement explaining the desirable characteristics of a well-managed library's printed books collection is as follows:

> Henry James and Howard Sturgis had nothing nearer to a library than a few dozen shelves of heterogeneous volumes; and indeed, even in houses commonly held to be 'booky' one finds, nine times out of ten, not a library but a book-dump. But such a library as that of I Tatti is the book-worm's heaven: the fulfilment of all he has dreamed that a great working library ought to be, continually weeded out and renewed, 'not made of spent deeds but of doing', not a dusty mausoleum of dead authors but a glorious assemblage of eternally living ones.[5]

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[4] Nimitz Library, About the Library. Accessed on 6 Feb 2017: usna.edu/Library/about/index.php
[5] Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton Century Co, 1934), p. 327.

THE FACILITY

The library facility itself serves not only as an edifice for the books and manuscripts, but as a central component of student life. Midshipmen can be found in the library at all hours. They do what one would expect in a library: study, work on homework and projects, or read for enjoyment and self-fulfillment. Additionally, the library provides midshipmen with a home away from Bancroft Hall, where interruptions are fewer, distractions are less, and the environment promotes intellectual endeavors. Research has shown positive correlation between library usage and retention as well as student performance.[6] Causality aside,[7] better students use the library, suggesting that either the library is a significant asset for students who perform well, or that the library promotes success. Either case is a strong statement about the significance of the library.

Additionally, libraries provide students and faculty a place to encounter others' opinions as well as information not provided in classrooms. Not all education is, nor can be, provided by instructors in classrooms and laboratories. Experiential learning (applied learning with a strong reflective component) applies equally to information as it does to hands-on activities. The library is the ideal environment for students to pursue co-curricular learning, whether sparked by an idea from a class or energized by personal curiosity.

Finally, the Naval Academy library also serves dual purpose as what would be the Student Union at another school. With a gate count of almost 300,000 visits a year,[8] Nimitz Library is a hub for academics work and for meeting and interacting with other midshipmen and faculty who are outside of a student's daily routine, distinctions that are made more significant by the regimental organization of the brigade and its activities. The library provides varied and adaptable spaces for collaborative group work. The coffee bar and caffeine are catalysts for conversation. These roles cannot be fulfilled by other library-like functions such as digital repositories or circulation desks disconnected from the collection and services. The library space at the Naval Academy is fundamental to midshipman life, both inside of the academic sphere and outside of it.

THE LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARY STAFF

Librarians and library staff serve as collectors and organizers of curated information resources. Applying their varied and interdependent areas of expertise, the staff serves as consultants in helping midshipmen explore, evaluate, and exploit the universe of information. Librarians and faculty collaborate to help students understand information fluency as critical thinking applied to the search, retrieval, and evaluation, and use of information sources and their creative, constructive use.

The value of developing and graduating broadly educated citizens who can proficiently and ethically identify, gather, assess, and use information is widely upheld both within the Naval Academy and also by

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[6] Soria, Krista M., Jan Fransen, and Shane Nackerud. "Library use and undergraduate student outcomes: New evidence for students' retention and academic success." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 13.2 (2013): 147-164. Accessed on 8 Dec 2016: 128.220.160.145/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/portal_pre_print/current/articles/13.2soria.pdf

[7] Stone, Graham, and Bryony Ramsden. "Library Impact Data Project: looking for the link between library usage and student attainment." *College and Research Libraries* 74.6 (2013): 546-559. Accessed on 8 Dec 2016: http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/15038/5/546.full.pdf

[8] Nimitz Library, About the Library. Accessed on 6 Feb 2017: usna.edu/Library/about/index.php

our accreditor. The Middles States Commission on Higher Education requires institutions to show that students, "acquire and demonstrate essential skills including… critical analysis and reasoning…and information literacy."[9] The intentional teaching and support of information literacy makes an integral contribution to the Naval Academy's Seven Attributes of a Graduate which seek to develop graduates who are "critical thinkers and creative decision makers"[10] and also to development of the Academy's Core Curricular Learning Outcome that midshipmen should be able to critically reason in order to "sufficiently obtain, critically analyze, appropriately interpret, and use … information…."[11]

Tools can create the illusion of simplicity; critical thinking about information reveals complexity and nuance. However, information literacy has to be learned, which implies that it must be taught.[12] Strong and sustained collaboration between faculty (content experts) and librarians (information access and evaluation experts) can generate effective learning experiences to impart lasting understanding and facility for navigating the information universe ethically, legally, and effectively.

CONCLUSION

The moral and mental aspects of the Naval Academy mission are supported and enabled by the development and maintenance of a modern library that impacts every aspect of the academic endeavor, influencing recruitment, retention, and the achievements of its people – midshipmen, faculty, and staff alike. The consequence of failing to maintain and further develop facilities in a way that is focused on the future is a reflection of the value the institution places on its educational mission. Dedication to a state-of-the-art, full-service library is a commitment to the immediate developmental needs of midshipmen and also to the development of life-long learning and critical-thinking; as related to, the ethical accessing, evaluating, and applying of information sources, while at the Naval Academy and beyond.

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9 MSCHE. "Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation" Accessed on 16 Feb 2017: msche.org/publications/RevisedStandardsFINAL.pdf

10 United States Naval Academy. "Attributes of a Naval Academy Graduate." Accessed on 16 Feb 2017: usna.edu/StrategicPlan/graduates.php

11 United States Naval Academy. "Core Learning Outcomes." Accessed on on 16 Feb 2017: usna.edu/Academics/_files/documents/assessment/CLOsandPreamble%20FEB%202015.pdf

12 Nimitz Library, About the Library. Accessed on 6 Feb 2017: usna.edu/Library/about/index.php