

Making Residence Hall Libraries Relevant in the 21st Century:
Use of the Collections at the University of Illinois Residence Hall Libraries

Research Proposal for 590 EV

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Abstract

The trend over the past twenty years is for libraries in the residence halls of colleges and universities to close or lose funding. However at the University of Illinois the residence hall libraries continue to stay well funded and apparently relevant to the students who live in the halls according to attendance and circulation figures. This study will aim to determine how students view and use the collection, and what changes need to be made to the arrangement of the library in order to remain relevant in the 21st century.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Statement of the Problem	3
Review of Related Research	5
Research Design	7
Institutional Resources	12
Personnel	12
Budget	12
Anticipated Results	13
Limitations of the Study	13
Back Matter	14

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The Residence Hall Library System (RHLS) consists of eight libraries in the dorms and a resource center across the University of Illinois campus, holding a total of about 27,000 volumes. While the RHLS is part of the much larger University of Illinois Library System, it has a unique administrative structure, collections, and mission. One professional librarian and two full time support staff members lead the RHLS. Graduate students perform many day-to-day operations and supervision of undergraduate library clerks. The collections of these libraries are primarily intended to provide leisure reading books, basic books appropriate for undergraduate papers, and career advice and examination preparation guides. In addition, the RHLS provides resources and research assistance for University Housing staff. Part of the mission statement of the RHLS reads “to provide students with resources that meet their educational, social, and cultural needs...” This mission is similar to the Undergraduate Library, with the difference that the RHLS attempts to encourage students to explore social and cultural books and media as a part of facilitating personal growth rather than academic growth, though certainly the two are connected in college students.

The RHLS libraries were opened in 1948, and have evolved their collections over the years. For instance, during the 1960s and 1970s, the residence hall libraries added a women’s issues and multicultural issues section in addition to the standard genres of biography, romance, mystery, and science fiction to reflect the cultural and political climate of the university. When the student union closed its Browsing Room, the RHLS took over those books and added them to their collection. The RHLS libraries are thus some of the only locations in the University of Illinois Library system (other than the Undergraduate Library) where visitors can browse the

collection for leisure reading materials in the same way that would be possible in a public library.

However, the role of the RHLS libraries as a browsing collection has changed in recent years. In August 2006, the Residence Hall Library System became fully integrated with the University of Illinois library system, making it possible to anyone on campus search the RHLS library collection in the regular library catalog, as well as to use the collection in person and through intra-campus interlibrary loan. This means that the collection circulates much more widely than it ever has before to people who never visit the library, and therefore never need to browse it. The RHLS also added DVDs to the libraries shortly before this, which helped attendance figures as well as circulation figures, since DVDs are the only material that does not circulate through ILL and must be picked up at the libraries in person.

Despite these changes, the RHLS libraries remain important to the students who live in the residence hall libraries, both in terms of both their physical spaces to study in, and their collections. Many students who live in the residence halls browse the collection (both books and media items) to fill leisure and academic needs, and probably the romance, mystery, and science fiction/fantasy sections are the most heavily browsed. However, certain of the sections have extremely low circulation rates, and it is unclear whether that is because students do not understand the purpose of the section or because the books in the section are not of interest. The questions that this research project will attempt to answer are the following: does the current arrangement continue to meet the needs of these students? Do students want a library layout that is more akin to a bookstore, with a variety of sections covering a wide subject area, or do they prefer the general collection Dewey Decimal Classification shelving style?

Review of Related Research

Since formal residence hall libraries have largely disappeared since their heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, the literature concerning residence hall libraries is sparse and not recent. The last study actually evaluating residence hall libraries was published in 1985, though there have been descriptions of residence hall library systems since then, such as the University of Michigan's system described by Keleher et al. in 1990. The other studies that have been done on any large scale are as Stanford's 1969 examination of the educational potential of residence hall libraries, Ariew's 1978 study of the failure of open access (i.e. no staff or formal circulation system) residence hall libraries, and Oltmanns's 1985 study of the purposes and uses of residence hall libraries. These all tend towards the conclusion that residence hall libraries are more effective if they are well-funded and maintained, containing more leisure reading and less focus on educational material. Using residence halls as a site for library instruction is another idea that librarians have for meeting students where they are rather than waiting for them to come to the library. However, librarians do not necessarily find an educational presence in the residence halls to be productive, such as a misguided outreach attempt at Bowling Green State University published by Nims in 1998.

In place of literature concerning residence hall library collection use assessments, assessments of small public library collections are the most relevant, particularly in libraries that have adopted special arrangements based on genre or subject rather than Dewey Decimal Classification arrangements. To this end, of particular interest was Hopkins's 2007 description of the arrangement of a small public library branch in Australia, as well as various descriptions of the rearrangement of a branch of the Maricopa County Public Library. Both of these arranged the entire collection in terms of broad subject area and found that circulation was strong. However in both cases this happened in conjunction with the opening of a new branch library, and so it is

unclear how much the unique arrangement of the collection had to do with increased circulation, nor were the evaluations very formal, rather relying heavily on output measures and anecdotes. An important observation from the Australian library in response to criticism of "dumbing down" the library is that they were trying to make the collection more accessible to everyone, even those who are not sophisticated library users.

Another aspect of the relevant literature is that of what the role of classification is in libraries. Bowman in 2005 published a history of classification systems in British libraries, which shows how classification only became important in the 1890s as British public libraries increasingly changed to open stacks and thus needed a way for library patrons to find materials. While at the beginning there were a variety of classification systems, by the 1930s the vast majority of libraries used the Dewey Decimal Classification. Bowman notes that even if a improvement of Dewey for public libraries were devised, the trouble and expense of reclassifying would obviate its use (which is in fact the situation of the University of Illinois library who is one of the few major research libraries to use Dewey Decimal Classification instead of Library of Congress). The phenomena of even relatively simple classification befuddling users has been noted time and again, for instance by Brisco in 2004 who visited a bookstore to observe ways in which its arrangement varied from libraries, and determined that the arrangement of a bookstore makes it no easier to find specific books than in a library, and probably harder. Boter and Wedel in 2005 did a study which showed that user perceptions of genre collections in Dutch libraries varied from the actual categorizations the library employed and suggested a method using circulation records for determining how users would categorize the collection.

Research Design

Goals and Objectives:

The goals of the research are to determine how relevant the genre collections in the residence hall libraries are to students who use them to browse for materials.

Hypotheses:

- 1.** Relative to their size, circulation rates will be higher in genre browsing collections than the general collection areas.
- 2.** Students who use the library primarily for leisure reading purposes will tend to find titles by browsing.
- 3.** Students who browse will prefer to browse in traditional divisions of genre fiction, meaning romance, mystery, and science fiction/fantasy.

Assumptions:

Students who come to the library for books are more likely to want light reading that is very different from the books they are assigned for classes. These students are also more likely to browse in areas that contain the types of books they enjoy, without a particular book in mind. Genre areas that contain light reading are more likely to be the traditional fictional separations of genre.

Definitions:

Genre collections are sections of the RHLS libraries, which are separate from the normal 000-900 Dewey ranges but are within each section classified with Dewey Decmical Classification or alphabetically by subject in Biographies. These sections currently are as follows: Biographies, Mysteries, Science Fiction/Fantasy, Romance, Self-Help, Women, Multicultural, College/Career, and Test Preparation.

Popularity is defined as the number of times items in a section circulate, according to circulation statistics.

Browsing is defined as coming to the library to find a book, without any particular title or even section of the library in mind.

Leisure reading is defined as books read for recreational purposes or to facilitate personal hobbies in distinction to **Academic reading**, which are books, assigned for class reading or for use in a class assignment.

Methodology:

Several types of data will be collected in order to assess the collection and measure both the extent and the performance of the collection, following the guidelines in Connie Van Fleet's chapter "Evaluating Collection" from *Library Evaluation: A Casebook and Can-Do Guide*.

Extent Measures

Tallies: The extent data will consist of tallies that will show the size of the collection at each individual RHLS library and the resource center, as well as a tally of how many volumes are held in each genre section or hundred division of Dewey and a ratio measure of volumes per resident in the halls served by that library, which of course will not reflect users who do not live in the halls. The data will also tally the approximate percentage of the budget spent on each genre collection area.

Performance Measures

Several measures will be employed to assess performance of the library, which includes both outputs and outcomes.

Use

Circulation: The numbers and types of books that circulate can be obtained through the circulation system (Voyager) reports. The reports will be obtained for each of the eight libraries and the resource center, and will show number of items checked out in the library (as opposed to circulated through Interlibrary Loan) in the past four semesters for each genre collection, as well as the number of items checked out in each Dewey hundred division for the general collection. This will be compared to the size of the collection as a whole, and thus will indicate by a percentage which sections are more popular relative to their size.

In-house use: Due to the nature of many materials in the RHLS libraries with controversial sexual, cultural or political information and the population of college students who often are seeking information that they want to keep concealed from peers and parents, it is well known that may be that students are hesitant to actually check out books in certain sections representing potentially sensitive subject matter. To account for these, students would be asked via signage to not re-shelve their books at each library for a month long period. The undergraduate library clerks will record the bar code of each item found on a table or placed at the edge of the shelf at the end of their shifts.

User Satisfaction

Survey: To learn about how students view the arrangement of the library a survey instrument was devised (Appendix A) and pre-tested by colleagues, and significantly revised based on this pre-test. The survey does not ask for names or other identifying details. It is intended to identify outputs and outcomes of student library use, such amount and type, and whether the student is able to find materials of interest and whether those materials are what the student wanted or needed. The survey will also solicit suggestions about the arrangement of the library. The University of Illinois IRB has not granted approval, but this process will begin shortly.

Assuming IRB approval, the survey will be distributed in two different ways, providing different types of samples to compare. First, to obtain a self-selected non-probability sample of people (students and outside visitors or staff) who use the libraries, the survey will be given over a period of six weeks to every student who checks out any item from the residence hall libraries, and surveys will also be available in the library for students who use the collection but do not check out materials. Survey respondents will be asked to fill out the survey (and encouraged to do so at the time of checking out an item) and either return in to the library or send it through campus mail. The drawback of this method is that it will be difficult to ensure that each person only responds once.

Second, to obtain a simple random probability sample, the survey will be converted to HTML format and emails inviting participation sent to approximately 1000 randomly selected members of a population defined as undergraduate students who are living in a University residence hall (this would not include Private Certified Housing). This sample size is assuming a response rate of 25%, and requiring 90% confidence with 4% error rate out of a population of approximately 8000 students.

Treatment of the Data:

The data about the collection itself will be analyzed descriptively, for instance showing the ratio of volumes in the library to population served, and indicating total numbers that can be averaged or made into percentages.

Extent Measures

Tallies: Tallies will be entered into spreadsheets as follows:

Collection Size

Library	Volumes	Population Served	Ratio of volumes/population
Allen			
Busey-Evans			
FAR			
Gregory			
ISR			
LAR			
PAR			
Peabody			
Res. Cen.			
Total			

Holdings by Section

Range	All	B-E	FAR	Gre	ISR	LAR	PAR	Pea	Res. Cen.	Total
000										
100										
200										
300										
400										
500										
600										
700										
800										
900										
Biographies										
Romance										
Sci-Fi/Fantasy										
Mysteries										
Self-Help										
Women										
Multicultural										
College/Career										
Test Prep										

Collection Expenditure

Section	Expense	% of total
Biographies		
Romance		
Sci-Fi/Fantasy		
Mysteries		
Self-Help		
Women		

Multicultural		
College/Career		
Test Prep		
General		
Total		

Performance Measures

Use

Circulation: Data can be downloaded from Voyager using Excel format, and will be presented in approximately this format, showing total raw numbers of times an item was charged:

Range	All	B-E	FAR	Gre	ISR	LAR	PAR	Pea	Res. Cen.	Total
000										
100										
200										
300										
400										
500										
600										
700										
800										
900										
Biographies										
Romance										
Sci-Fi/Fantasy										
Mysteries										
Self-Help										
Women										
Multicultural										
College/Career										
Test Prep										

Since this is the same format to show total holdings for each collection, it will be easy to indicate what percentage of the collection held actually circulates, and so data will also be presented in that format in the final report.

In-house use: Taking the bar code numbers that library clerks recorded, the bibliographic record for each item will be obtained, and the title, author, and call number including genre

collection if appropriate will be listed in a spreadsheet. Raw numbers of items will be recorded into the same spreadsheet used above to record circulation figures for each library.

User Satisfaction

Survey: Data will be entered and analyzed using the Survey Power 6.0 software package. See Appendix B for sample data report. The probability sample and the non-probability sample will be entered separately, using descriptive analysis. The probability sample will be analyzed using correlational statistics to show correlations between browsing and use of genre collections; residence hall and favorite types of materials; and any other relevant correlations.

Institutional Resources

Available institutional resources include a computer lab, printing, photocopying, and necessary library research resources. Undergraduate library clerks will do some of the data collection on their regular shifts as an in kind contribution.

Personnel

In addition to the primary investigator, personnel will consist of undergraduate library clerks already employed, who will be paid for extra hours to assist with data collection and data entry. Other personnel will be Residence Hall Library Staff who will be consulted as part of their normal workday and will be an in kind contribution.

Budget

Category	Cost	Funding Requested
Wages for Principal Investigator	120 hrs @ \$13.00/hr	1,560.00
Clerk for Data Entry/Collection	40 hrs @ \$8.50/hr	340.00
Printing/Copying	1000 pp @ .07/pg	70.00
Survey Power license	\$100.00	100.00
Total		2,070.00

Anticipated Results

The results are expected to provide data on the outcomes of the residence hall libraries, in addition to inputs and outputs. The immediate impact of the study will be to provide data that will support decision making about the future arrangement and collection development decisions of the University of Illinois Residence Hall Library System. The study will hopefully reveal something about the pleasure reading habits of college students.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation to the study is that it will show only one year of residents in the halls, the populations of which change from semester to semester and year to year. However, most halls have a homogenous core population of residents who tend to live in those halls, and thus some expectation of continuity is possible. Another problem that this brings about is that due to the varying natures of the halls, findings for one hall cannot necessarily be applied to other halls.

While quite a bit of circulation occurs through interlibrary loan, it will be beyond the scope of this project to understand how the collection is used in that aspect, or who the users of it are. Thus collection development decisions based on what material gets used by the primary target audience of RHLS vs. people who use interlibrary loan will not be possible.

Another limitation noted above is that due to the nature of the survey distribution it will be impossible to track whether respondents have returned more than one survey.

Appendix A: Student Use Survey

Residence Hall Library Survey

Thank you for helping to improve the Residence Hall Library System! We really appreciate your answers, and please contact rhlib@uiuc.edu if you have questions.

1. Status (check one)

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Graduate Student
- ☐ Faculty/Staff

2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. If you are a student, what is your major? (write below)

4. How often do you use any Residence Hall Library? (check one)

- ☐ 4-7 times a week
- ☐ 1-3 times a week
- ☐ 4-7 times a semester
- ☐ 1-3 times a semester
- ☐ I don't use any Residence Hall Libraries

If you checked "I don't use any Residence Hall Library, please tell us why:

5. What is the Residence Hall Library you use most of the time? (check one)

- ☐ Allen
- ☐ Busey-Evans
- ☐ FAR
- ☐ Gregory
- ☐ ISR
- ☐ LAR
- ☐ PAR
- ☐ Peabody

6. What types of materials do you use at any Residence Hall Library? (check all that apply)

- ☐ DVDs
- ☐ CDs
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Books
- ☐ Exams

___ Cliffs Notes

If you checked Books on Question 6, proceed to question 7. If you did not, you are finished with the survey. Thanks for participating!

7. Why do you most often use books at any Residence Hall Library? (check one)

___ Academic reasons (use them for class or for an assignment)

___ Leisure reading (use them to read for personal enjoyment in free time)

8. How do you most often find books to use? (check one)

___ Look them up in the library catalog yourself

___ Ask someone else for assistance in looking them up

___ Browse the shelves

9. What areas of any Residence Hall Library do you most frequently use books from? (rank your three most commonly used)

___ Reference

___ New Books

___ Main collection (Dewey ranges 000s-900s)

___ Biographies

___ Mysteries

___ Science Fiction/Fantasy

___ Romance

___ Self-Help

___ Women's Issues

___ Multicultural Issues

___ Career/College

___ Test Prep

10. When you are looking for a book in any Residence Hall Library, how often are you able to find a book on the shelves that you need/want? (check one)

___ All the time

___ Most of the time

___ Some of the time

___ None of the time

11. After you have selected a book to use at any Residence Hall Library, how often does the book turn out to be what you needed/wanted? (check one)

___ All the time

___ Most of the time

___ Some of the time

___ None of the time

12. Do you have any comments or suggestions for what you would like to see at the Residence Hall Libraries?

Thanks very much for participating in this survey! Your comments will help us to improve your library.

Appendix B: Sample Descriptive Data Report

Sample data represents falsified data collected during pre-testing of the survey instrument. For all questions, n=9.

1. Status

	Count	Percentage
A.Freshman	1	11.11%
B.Sophomore	3	33.33%
C.Junior	1	11.11%
D.Senior	1	11.11%
E.Graduate Student	2	22.22%
F.Faculty/Staff	1	11.11%

2. Gender

	Count	Percentage
A.Male	3	33.33%
B.Female	6	66.67%

3. If you are a student, what is your major?

Top 8 Responses	Count	Percentage
Geology	1	12.50%
Gender Studies	1	12.50%
French	1	12.50%
Actuarial Science	1	12.50%
Undecided	1	12.50%
Library and Information Science	1	12.50%
Business	1	12.50%
Spanish/English	1	12.50%

4. How often do you use any Residence Hall Library?

	Count	Percentage
A.4-7 times a week	0	0%
B.1-3 times a week	4	44.44%
C.4-7 times a semester	0	0%
D.1-3 times a semester	4	44.44%
E.I don't use any Residence Hall Libraries	1	11.11%

5. If you checked "I don't use any Residence Hall Library, please tell us why

Top 1 Responses	Count	Percentage
didn't know about them	1	100.00%

6. What is the Residence Hall Library you use most of the time?

	Count	Percentage
A.Allen	1	12.50%
B.Busey-Evans	0	0%
C.FAR	2	25.00%
D.Gregory	1	12.50%
E.ISR	0	0%
F.LAR	1	12.50%
G.PAR	0	0%
H.Peabody	3	37.50%

7. What types of materials do you use at any Residence Hall Library?

	Count	Percentage	Respondent Percentage
A.DVDs	4	25.00%	50.00%
B.CDs	1	6.25%	12.50%
C.Magazines	2	12.50%	25.00%
D.Books	8	50.00%	100.00%
E.Exams	0	0%	0%
F.Cliffs Notes	1	6.25%	12.50%

8. Why do you most often use books at any Residence Hall Library?

	Count	Percentage
A.Academic reasons (use them for class or for an assignment)	0	0%

B. Leisure reading (use them to read for personal enjoyment in free time)	8	100.00%
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9. How do you most often find books to use?

	Count	Percentage
A. Look them up in the library catalog yourself	5	62.50%
B. Ask someone else for assistance in looking them up	0	0%
C. Browse the shelves	3	37.50%

10. What areas of any Residence Hall Library do you most frequently use books from?

	Count	Average	Importance	Percentage
A. Reference	1	1.00	3	4.55%
B. New Books	5	1.20	14	22.73%
C. Main collection (Dewey ranges 000s-900s)	1	3.00	1	4.55%
D. Biographies	2	1.50	5	9.09%
E. Mysteries	4	1.75	9	18.18%
F. Science Fiction/Fantasy	3	2.33	5	13.64%
G. Romance	4	2.50	6	18.18%
H. Self-Help	1	3.00	1	4.55%
I. Women's Issues	1	3.00	1	4.55%
J. Multicultural Issues	0	0	0	0%
K. Career/College	0	0	0	0%
L. Test Prep	0	0	0	0%

Top 3 Responses Count	(1)	(2)	(3)
A. Reference	1	0	0
B. New Books	4	1	0
C. Main collection (Dewey ranges 000s-900s)	0	0	1
D. Biographies	1	1	0
E. Mysteries	2	1	1
F. Science Fiction/Fantasy	0	2	1
G. Romance	0	2	2
H. Self-Help	0	0	1
I. Women's Issues	0	0	1
J. Multicultural Issues	0	0	0
K. Career/College	0	0	0
L. Test Prep	0	0	0

11. When you are looking for a book in any Residence Hall Library, how often are you able to find a book on the shelves that you need/want?

	Count	Percentage
A. All the time	2	25.00%
B. Most of the time	5	62.50%
C. Some of the time	1	12.50%
D. None of the time	0	0%

12. After you have selected a book to use at any Residence Hall Library, how often does the book turn out to be what you needed/wanted?

	Count	Percentage
A. All the time	1	14.29%
B. Most of the time	4	57.14%
C. Some of the time	2	28.57%
D. None of the time	0	0%

13. Do you have any comments or suggestions for what you would like to see at the Residence Hall Libraries?

Text Memos were not analyzed for this report.

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