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Library Redux.

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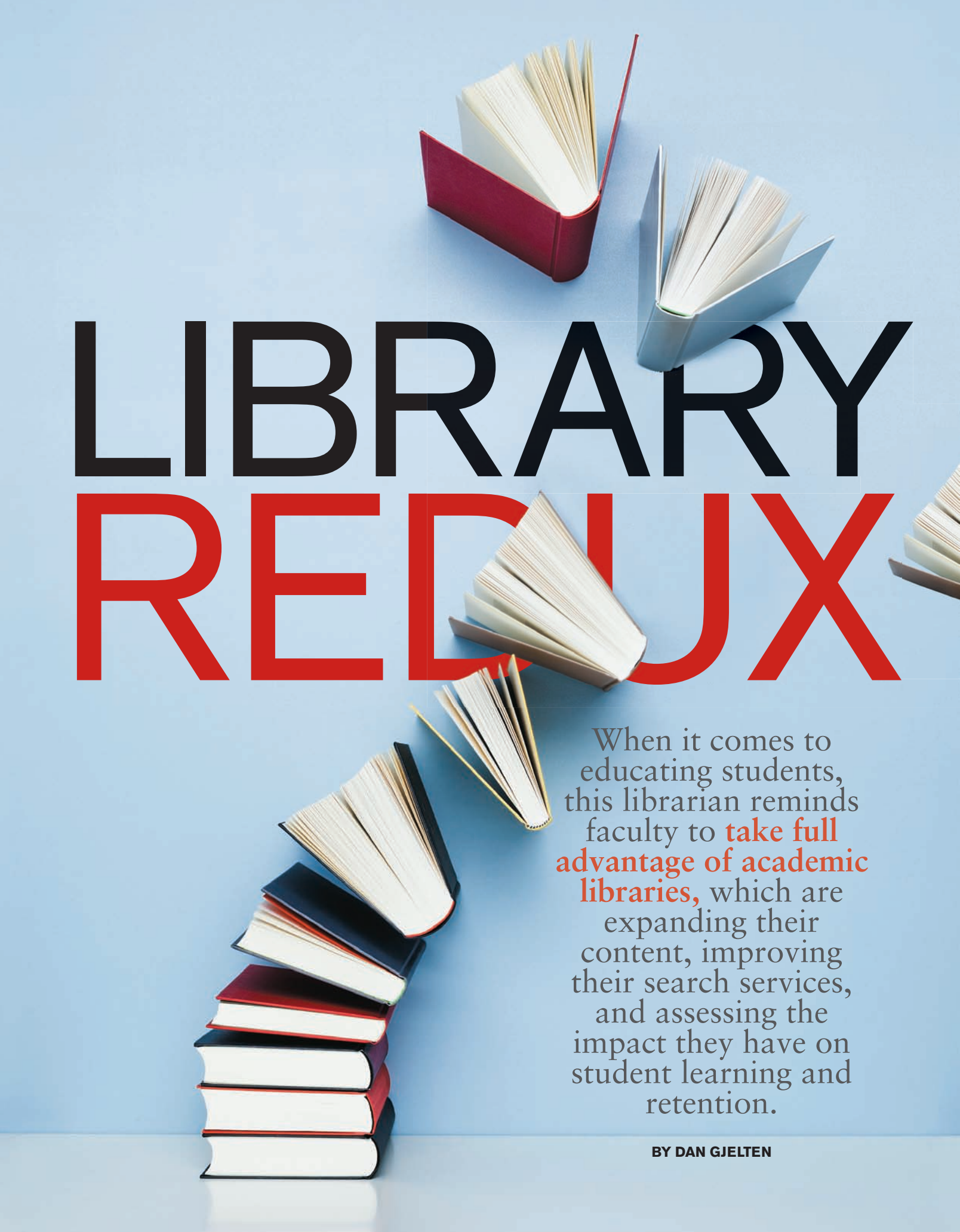

LIBRARY REDUX

When it comes to educating students, this librarian reminds faculty to **take full advantage of academic libraries,** which are expanding their content, improving their search services, and assessing the impact they have on student learning and retention.

BY DAN GJELTEN

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As a librarian, I was excited to turn to a recent article in *BizEd* and find a picture of a student standing in a beautiful library and loaded down with books. I was sure an article titled "Students Who Love Research" would feature the academic library as an essential part of business education. But this was an article about real-world experiences, and the word "library" did not occur even once.

The experience led me to wonder how the library is currently viewed in business education. What is its role? What kinds of research expectations do deans and faculty have of their students? Is the library still a fundamental feature of business education, or has it become just another metaphor?

As the Director of Libraries at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, I strive to make certain that the library is central to the academic mission of the institution and that its collections enhance scholarship in all of our programs. I am convinced that we can collaborate with faculty to teach students the essential lifelong skills associated with discovering, obtaining, and evaluating data in a technology- and information-rich world. But I also worry that administrators, faculty, and students don't understand how many needs the library serves—and I fear that the library will cease to be a living partner in teaching and learning.

The Library's Role

Like other industries, academic libraries are experiencing many tensions. We must cultivate a deep understanding of the larger ecosystem in which we operate, manage growing technological complexity, and respond to a high level of competition. We also must serve a segmented market, providing sophisticated support to the faculty who are engaged in scholarship and knowledge creation, while offering basic instruction to students learning to retrieve and use information.

At the same time, we must cope with the pressures at work in higher education—the need to affirm the value of a degree, the need for assessment measures that confirm we are achieving our goals, and the need to rethink our own roles in light of new realities.

Our responsibility to the business school is clear. As Christopher Puto, dean of UST's Opus College of Business, says, "We expect our students to be effective problem solvers after graduation. They should be able to identify their information need, then find, analyze, assemble, and use information to make decisions."

Students need to understand not just how to conduct research, but how to put it together in a meaningful way, notes Jeff Oxman, an assistant professor in the finance department. In many papers, he says, students "have cited this and this and this—they have a bibliography, but they don't have a story."

Of course, research isn't everything, as Lisa Abendroth points out when she asks her students to imagine doing research on the tango. "Then I ask, 'Now, could you come up and dance for us?' and of course, they couldn't," says Abendroth, an associate professor in the marketing department. But unless students know how to conduct primary research, she believes they will be inclined to make decisions based on gut reactions, which she tells them won't be acceptable in the workplace. Instead, they need to know how to draw conclusions based on credible information that provides context for contemporary business problems. They need the library.

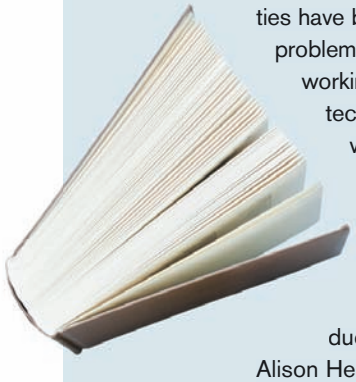
Search Energy Optimization

Even I will admit that users can find it challenging to navigate the large and rich collections of electronic content that academic libraries have amassed today. For instance, a little more than a decade ago, the UST libraries had a collection of 2,000 print journals; now we provide access to more than 50,000 electronic journals. As we continue to expand, it becomes even more important that we find ways to remove barriers between users and content. We must help students develop the skills they need to discover information in a high-tech environment—but we

Developing Critical Skills

Today's libraries offer far more than access to books, periodicals, and digital content. They provide an environment where business students can learn and hone the most crucial skills they'll need to be successful in the 21st-century marketplace.

It's not hard to guess what those skills will be. One predictor is a biennial survey from the University of Washington's Office of Educational Assessment, which asks alumni what abilities are essential for students to have five years and ten years after graduation. Over the years, the following abilities have been identified as most important: defining and solving problems, locating the information needed to make decisions, working and learning independently, working effectively with technology, speaking effectively, and critically analyzing written information. Libraries can help students with virtually all of those tasks.



Another source outlines even more plainly what kinds of skills graduates will need. Project Information Literacy, a national study about early adults and their information-seeking behaviors, produced a 2012 report authored by its executive director, Alison Head. She notes that employers want college hires who can "jump into the messy situations," "read through stuff they may never use," and apply "dogged persistence." She quotes one employer who says that a comprehensive research approach is essential because "it solves immediate information problems and sheds light on related issues critical for future work—the lifeblood of any organization." Head adds, "Workplace research requires a strategy that imagines all possible answers."

All possible answers? Again, these can be found at the library.

Because students don't always understand how to use the library's resources, it's important for teachers to encourage them to develop information literacy skills. A teacher who does this very well is John Sailors, an associate professor of marketing at the University of St. Thomas.

In the applied business research class required for UST's full-time MBA, Sailors helps students see that library research has direct application to real-world problems. Because students work with external clients, they must first establish credibility by learning the industry context, history, issues, and specialized language. Students generally begin their projects by meeting with librarians to learn about secondary research.

"I tell them to search forward and backward," says Sailors. "Once they find a good article, I suggest that they see who has cited it since publication and to look through the notes and bibliography for earlier sources."

In addition, Sailors helps students become more discerning in their research by showing them how to distinguish between scholarly journals and more popular publications or trade magazines. He also helps them understand the importance of publication date—the significance of which may differ by project. And he tells them to consider carefully who collected and published the data, because publishers may have particular points of view. Once they understand how to sort through and assess information, his students will always understand what a powerful resource the library can be.

must minimize the time they waste in fruitless searching.

For that reason, at UST we've created dozens of research guides that address known scholarly research needs. Students can use them to learn more about particular disciplines, including international business, business law, entrepreneurship, marketing, economics, and statistics. The guides also help them find data about specific companies and industries. Each guide points users to starting places and explains how to use the best resources in the libraries' electronic collections.

We also tell students that, as soon as they get frustrated or feel like they're not getting results, they should consult a librarian. The guides include photos of the specialist librarians who will be most helpful in the area of business research, an online app that

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enables appointment scheduling, and the opportunity to chat with a librarian in real time.

Since most of our faculty and students access our collections via the web, we've created a position for a web developer who can design pages that are functional, intuitive, and mobile-ready. These new page designs also allow us to communicate with users we may never see face-to-face. In addition, we use Twitter, Facebook, and a blog to stay connected with users.

We are working to develop "moment of need" interventions that put resources in front of users before they even realize they need them. These interventions require close communication with faculty and students, who can alert us to assignments and due dates. We then can provide users with relevant and specific research hints through everything from social media sites to our portable whiteboards at library entrances.

Other libraries that serve business schools are offering more services related to the databases students will use once they enter the workforce. For instance, some libraries are appointing Big Data specialists who can help students and faculty understand how to sift through and analyze enormous datasets. The University of Tennessee Libraries have created the position of "data curation librarian" who will support the use and management of research data. Other libraries might post a job for a "data scientist," who can make "discoveries while swimming in data." That's how Thomas Davenport and D.J. Patil describe "The Sexiest Job in the 21st Century" in a *Harvard Business Review* article. As content and delivery methods change, libraries will continue to adapt.

Impact and Engagement

Even as libraries are making it simpler for students and faculty to navigate our vast collections, we're also measuring our usage and effectiveness so we can understand how our resources are being used.

Libraries have always been good at measuring inputs—how many books we've purchased, how many people have come in our doors, and how many reference questions we've answered. Increasingly, though, like all academic organizations, we're being asked to document the outputs and outcomes of our work. In simple terms, we need to assess the ways the library has changed the lives of the students it serves. In fact, libraries across the U.S. are working together to do just that.

In 2010, the Association of College and Research Libraries published a report called "The Value of Academic Libraries." Its goal was to articulate the impact libraries can have on their home institutions in terms of admissions, retention, graduation rates, student achievement, faculty research productivity, and even student placement. Many of these measures are difficult to design and implement, but assurance of learning is a hot issue in the education field. So, for many of us, identifying the ways that higher education changes student lives will be an ongoing and critical responsibility.

In fact, the UST Libraries are experimenting with ways to assess if student use of the library can be linked with academic performance. Once we've ensured anonymity, our goal is to determine whether

For More Reading

Information referenced in this article can be found in these sources:

■ "Students Who Love Research" appeared in the January/February 2013 issue of *BizEd*. It also can be found online at www.e-digitaleditions.com/i/100231.

■ "University of Washington Undergraduate Degree Recipients Five and Ten Years After Graduation (2008): Frequencies and Cohort Differences" was published by UW's Office of Educational Assessment in April 2009. It can be accessed at www.washington.edu/oea/pdfs/reports/OEAReport0902.pdf.

■ Project Information Literacy's "How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workforce" by Alison J. Head was published October 16, 2012. It can be found at projectinfolit.org/pdfs/PIL_fall2012_workplaceStudy_FullReport.pdf.

■ "The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report" was written by Megan Oakleaf for the Association of College and Research Libraries of Chicago, Illinois. It is available online at www.acrl.ala.org/value/?p=36.

■ "Library Use and Undergraduate Student Outcomes: New Evidence for Students' Retention and Academic Success" can be permanently accessed at http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/143312.

■ "Data Scientist: The Sexiest Job of the 21st Century" by Thomas Davenport and D.J. Patil appeared in the October 2012 edition of *Harvard Business Review*.

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library use—as indicated by book circulation, reference interactions, web use, database searches, and so on—correlates with higher grade point averages.

There's already some evidence that such a connection might exist, according to "Library Use and Undergraduate Student Outcomes," research conducted by staff of the University of Minnesota Libraries and posted on the Libraries and the Academy portal. According to the study, "students who use the library had an average cumulative GPA 0.20 points higher than students who did not use the library." In addition, students who used the library in their first semester were twice as likely to return for their second semester as students who were not library users.

Mission for the Future

Business school graduates will need to be adept at conducting research and knowing where to turn for the information they need, and it is part of the mission of the academic library to help them develop those essential skills. As long as academic libraries continue to develop appropriate collections, assist users with their research, prepare students for the 21st-century workplace, and assess the quality of their services, they will remain engaged partners in the delivery of business education. While beautiful physical spaces and printed books will always say "library" to many of us, the reality of the academic library will be even richer and more complex as we move forward.

Dan Gjelten is director of University Libraries for the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.