

1-1-2011

# Embedded Right Where the Students Live: A Librarian in the University Residence Halls

Dallas Long

*Illinois State University*, [dlong@ilstu.edu](mailto:dlong@ilstu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/fpml>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Long, D. (2011). Embedded right where the students live: A librarian in the residence halls. In K. Calkins and C. Knevild (Eds.), *Embedded librarians: Moving beyond one-shot instruction* (pp. 199-211). Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Milner Library at ISU ReD: Research and eData. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty and Staff Publications – Milner Library by an authorized administrator of ISU ReD: Research and eData. For more information, please contact [ISUREd@ilstu.edu](mailto:ISUREd@ilstu.edu).



## Embedded Right Where the Students Live: A Librarian in the University Residence Halls

---

Dallas Long

### Introduction

*“Good morning!” I exclaim cheerfully to the family who has just finished unloading boxes, a computer, and a micro-fridge onto the sidewalk. The parents and daughter look anxious and uncertain about what to do next. I pull a small wagon over to their car and ask, “Do you want help moving your belongings into your dorm room?” It’s Move-In Day, and more than 7,000 new students and their families are descending on the University of Illinois, preparing to move into the undergraduate residence halls and start a brand new year. “Are you our daughter’s residence hall director?” the mother inquires. “No,” I respond, “I’m your daughter’s librarian!”*

Most of the university’s faculty and staff avoid the carefully controlled chaos of Move-In Day, and often the only staff to be found are the Student Affairs professionals and resident advisors greeting families and checking students into the rooms that will be their home for the next ten months. I love participating in Move-In Day because my participation means that I’m often the first librarian the students meet during their college years. It is a wonderful opportunity to show the students that I care about their experiences on campus, but also provide tours of the libraries to interested parents. What a great way to make an impression on the students by being a friendly face during their first

day on campus. Later, students tell me often that when they call home to their parents and express frustrations with their classes, their parents suggest that they visit the librarian that helped them move into their room.

I am the Residential Life Librarian at the University of Illinois. I serve approximately 7,000 first-year and 3,000 upper-division students who live in seventeen undergraduate residence halls and apartments on the campus. We do not have a first-year experience program at the University of Illinois. Instead, we have a strong academic component embedded at University Housing and Residential Life, two of our Student Affairs divisions. Resources for academic support are rich within University Housing. Many of the students participate in one of the nine living-learning communities, where floors or entire residence halls serve as classroom environments. The students who reside there share an interest in an academic theme, such as learning about the allied health professions or exploring globalization and the cultures of the world. The general education curriculum is often taught in classrooms within the residence halls, and students participate in a variety of programs that explore concepts connected to the themes of their living-learning communities. Academic advisors, career counselors, health educators, tutors for

math, science, and writing—and yes, a librarian—are all available for the students who live there.

As the Residential Life Librarian, I am fully embedded in the residence halls. I manage eight small libraries in the residence halls, each with a collection that is carefully tailored to support the general education curriculum and especially the living-learning communities that operate in the halls. The collections include textbooks and supplemental reading material placed on reserve by instructors, popular reading material, guides that help students explore academic majors, and career and internship resources. I manage two full-time library assistants who support the libraries' acquisitions, cataloging, and processing of new materials. Teams of more than fifty student assistants staff the circulation desks. The libraries are principally open in the late afternoons until 2 o'clock in the morning—the hours when the undergraduate residence halls are typically busiest. The libraries are prime destinations for students seeking quiet places in which to study or work on group projects. The residence hall libraries' strength is their availability for students—located in the areas where they live, and operating at hours when other libraries on campus are closed. Another great strength is the residence hall libraries' collections related to diversity. The collection encompasses works of non-fiction and fiction written by or about historically oppressed groups or groups under-represented in literature, ranging from Pakistani poetry to collections of narratives by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender writers to scholarly works on the Korean immigrant experience in America. The emphasis on diversity is a fundamental aspect of the libraries' mission: to ensure that the libraries reflect the identities of the many peoples who reside in the residence halls and to ensure the visibility of students who do not belong to the majority culture.

My office is a converted dorm room, and I eat all my afternoon meals alongside the students in the dining halls. I am a full member of the Student Affairs professional staff, and I participate in

Student Affairs activities such as hiring and training resident advisors, chaperoning student events, and mediating roommate conflicts. I am extremely visible in the students' lives—I attend hall programs at night, advise a student organization, and generally “hang out” in the residence halls getting to know many of the students by their name and major. I receive the same professional development and training as other members of the student affairs staff, and I attend student affairs conferences as well as library conferences.

Unlike other librarians at the University of Illinois, I am not connected to an academic discipline and do not support the research of faculty. Instead, the student affairs professionals often jokingly call me “their” librarian because I often help them with literature searches and supply them with current news and articles relevant to their work. I maintain a strong relationship with the University Library and serve on many committees, but my position is otherwise exclusively devoted to working with students. My mission is to help the students develop strong academic skills as they transition to off-campus living and successfully navigate our complex research-intensive university. I am often engaged in the administration of my eight libraries, especially in collection development, but principally I see my role as an instruction and outreach librarian. I introduce first-year students to information literacy and research skills in a fundamentally different way than the instruction they receive as part of their general education curriculum.

### **Emerging Trend or Rediscovered Resource?**

Despite the emerging trend of embedded librarianship, a librarian in the residence halls is a very old idea. The first residence hall libraries were founded in 1928 at Harvard University, where a library was developed within each of seven residences for male students.<sup>1</sup> The house libraries, as the residence hall libraries were called then, were considered the “the integration of tutors and students, under the guid-

ance of resident librarians, to make these houses genuine living and learning centers and to breathe new life into the instructional methods of Harvard College.”<sup>2</sup>

By the 1950s, libraries and librarians in undergraduate residence halls had appeared at dozens of colleges and universities throughout the United States.<sup>3</sup> Stanford supported librarians in residence halls as serving a strong academic purpose. He states,

There is increasing interest in experimental new types of campus housing that will contribute directly to the intellectual, cultural, and social development of students. New awareness of the educational potential of residence hall libraries is indicative of growing interest in creating student living quarters and facilities where enriched learning, as well as rooms for sleeping and eating, are provided.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently residence hall libraries became the center of academic programs based in the halls.<sup>5</sup> At the University of Illinois, there was a strong emphasis on the residence hall libraries’ role in community building and these libraries were marketed to new students as ‘neighborhood’ libraries in which they could find their local newspapers and other familiar items. The residents of the respective halls shaped the library collections, with most requests for new purchases coming from residents and fulfilled by librarians from the University Library. Consequently, each library evolved to illustrate the culture of the hall in which it was based.

Scant literature regarding residence hall libraries exists after the mid-1980s. This can arguably be attributed to the closure of residence hall libraries at many institutions. The reasons for the closures of most residence hall libraries vary, from lack of student interest and support, cuts in institutional budgets, and the need to convert facilities into living quarters to accommodate the growing number of first-year students.<sup>6,7</sup> Indiana University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois

at Urbana-Champaign are the only institutions of higher education where residence hall libraries are known to still be operating as late as the 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

The residence hall libraries at the University of Illinois were founded in the 1960s, and a full-time librarian was hired a few short years afterwards. University Housing maintained the libraries’ facilities and contributed wages for the student assistants and funds for collections, while the University Library paid the librarian’s salary.<sup>9</sup> The Residential Life Librarian’s reporting line and salary were transferred to University Housing in the early 1990s, making the librarian and the libraries fully integrated into the Student Affairs Division.<sup>10</sup> As one of the few remaining Residential Life Librarians, I take my role seriously and make myself highly visible to the student community. What better way to make a librarian accessible to the students than to place one right where the students live?

### **Teaching Information Literacy**

I begin introducing library skills to the students by training the resident advisors to encourage good study habits among the students living on their floors. Resident advisors are often my best allies in reaching out to the students who live in the residence halls. They know the students on their floors intimately, and they are well trained in the advising, counseling, and other student services that exist for our students’ emotional and physical well-being. Academic affairs, however, is often a mysterious dimension of the university for the resident advisors. This is where I step in to provide the resident advisors with a comprehensive training program; I train the resident advisors to be experts in the variety of academic resources that exist on campus. This means teaching the resident advisors to understand when and why they would visit a librarian and what resources exist in the libraries to support their own academic endeavors. During the several weeks of training that the resident advisors receive prior to Move-In Day, I hold a workshop in

which the resident advisors brainstorm about good study strategies. I coach the resident advisors on how to talk to students about their classes, how to identify students who may be struggling academically, and how to recommend the students visit a librarian, tutor, professor, or academic advisor for assistance.

In turn, the resident advisors invite me to floor meetings in the first two or three weeks of the fall semester. At the floor meetings, I am able to meet with many of the new freshmen at once. We talk about effective study skills and time management, and I describe how librarians can help them develop thesis statements and locate information for their papers. I offer one-on-one research consultations right where they live—no need to come even as far as the libraries in the residence halls. I have a laptop that I bring with me to the common lounges, and we can have a research consultation wherever it is most convenient for the student.

The residence halls include living quarters for upper-division students, too. I take a different approach with the older students since they are not as likely to attend floor meetings or require their resident advisor's assistance as often as the freshmen. Free food always brings students out of their rooms. I put up flyers in the halls advertising dinner with the librarian, and I bring free pizzas to the student lounges. I do not generally have a large turnout of students, but there are always new and curious students who are happy to meet with me. We enjoy our pizza dinner, and I talk about what the library can do for them, hand out brochures and study tips, and answer questions about the library's hours, policies, and ways of contacting the librarians.

Getting to know the students personally and building a sense of trust are vital steps to being successful as their embedded librarian. I must be highly visible in those first few weeks of the semester—especially as I build a rapport with the freshmen. The key is showing up and simply getting to know the students. I attend hall programs, eat in the cafeterias, go to musical performances

and guest speaker lectures, attend social events, and spend time—along with the rest of the Student Affairs staff—learning who my students are, where they come from, and what they hope to get out of college.

The first few weeks of the semester tend to be my slowest times of the year in terms of the number of students who actively seek me out for research consultations, but they are often my busiest time of the year creating visibility. By the time students are preparing their first papers of the semester, they begin to remember that I'm not just a friendly face; I'm a librarian too. My calendar fills up quickly with one-on-one research consultations, and I help the students develop better thesis statements, select the best sources, and develop searching skills for the library's online databases.

Personal research consultations are not my only way of providing instruction to the students. One of my most effective strategies for helping students develop information literacy skills is holding workshops in the residence halls' computer labs—but I disguise such workshops as fun activities. My most popular workshop is "Become an Editor on Wikipedia—Anyone Can Be an Expert!" The students select a subject—whether it's their favorite pop star or a baseball team—and they build a page for it on the social networking encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Of course it's difficult to find a subject that isn't already extensively covered on Wikipedia, but creating an unique entry isn't the point; I instruct them how to register as an editor on the site, identify the social conventions involved with writing an entry, and how to follow the discussion threads in which editors debate the finer points of an entry's validity.

Interwoven through the lesson, we discuss the features that make a "good" Wikipedia entry: fact checking, citations from credible sources, unbiased language, neutral points of view, and integrating opposing viewpoints.<sup>11</sup> They do not want their entries to be deleted or edited by someone else because their entry lacks credibility, so I teach them how to search other sites for information to include

in their entries, how to evaluate those sources for credibility and authority, and how to appropriately cite those sources on their own entry. The students love it, and they learn research skills at the same time. Of course I caution the students against relying on Wikipedia entries as sources for their academic coursework; we discuss how Wikipedia's very nature as a social networking tool that can be altered by anyone at any time can undermine its credibility.

I emphasize the importance of information literacy in an everyday context for my students. I meet regularly with the instruction librarians at the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois to discuss core competencies for information literacy, essential library resources, and changes to the library's catalog and electronic journals. Such meetings, however, do not always provide appropriate context for mapping core competencies to life skills outside the classroom. Serving as an embedded librarian, however, provides me with the unique opportunity to connect information literacy with a real world context for the students. The Wikipedia workshop is arguably a good example of how the concept of information literacy extends beyond teaching students how to use library resources but also encompasses information as a facet of perceiving knowledge. Library literature on information literacy, too, emphasizes the need to provide a real world grounding for teaching information literacy to students. Funes asserts:

Information literacy is more than library instruction; it includes an understanding of the landscape of information in today's world and knowledge of how to gather, evaluate and use information... Information literacy is the ability to understand the concepts and values of information in the context of...knowledge. Further, it is the ability to understand where information comes from, where it goes, and what the relationship is between the learner and the information world. It means being able to gather, analyze, and use information in an effective and meaningful manner.<sup>12</sup>

As an embedded librarian working in the residence halls, I take such statements to heart. I attempt to make as many of my lessons as possible relate to the students' living experiences and their daily lives as college students rather than making instruction sessions always connect to their classroom environments. Learning does not happen exclusively in the classroom—it is the whole of the student experience on the campus.

I teach traditional instruction sessions as well. Many of the living-learning communities have classes that meet regularly in the classroom spaces of the residence halls, and the students take classes there that support the academic programs of the living-learning communities. I invite the instructors to bring their students to the residence hall libraries, where I provide orientations to the students on the libraries' resources and collections. We also use the computer labs in the residence halls for traditional instruction sessions, where I introduce the students to the University Library's website and catalog, and I teach them how to locate resources that are specific to the curriculum of their class.

To ensure that my teaching is consistent with the instruction sessions taught by the librarians at the University Library and to ensure that my knowledge of the University Library's catalog and resources are current, I meet regularly with the instruction librarians and participate in their professional development opportunities and discussions. There is sometimes confusion on the part of the librarians regarding my role in the students' educational process. I explain the nature of my work frequently, and the burden is generally on me to seek out collaborations with librarians and to obtain information about professional development opportunities that are facilitated by the University Library. It's easy to forget an embedded librarian when the librarian does not work in an office within the University Library itself—it is up to me to remain connected.

Another strategy I use to introduce students to the concepts, if not the skills, of information

literacy is through a scavenger hunt conducted in the eight libraries that are located in the residence halls. Programming is an essential component of a resident advisor's responsibilities at many departments of Residential Life and Housing.<sup>13</sup> At University Housing at the University of Illinois, the resident advisors are required to produce two hall programs each semester—one program can be purely recreational, while the other must have an educational basis. The resident advisors are occasionally stumped for programming ideas that are simultaneously educational and engaging for the students. At least once per year, I suggest to the resident advisors that they organize a scavenger hunt with the residence hall libraries in mind.

The educational purpose of the scavenger hunt is to acquaint students with the elements of information literacy, such as learning how to find a copyright date on a published work or three subject headings in the catalog in which students can locate books on social justice. I design the scavenger hunt with the resident advisor, and together we design clues that will send students on a journey through the libraries' resources. The scavenger hunt is a surprisingly popular activity, but my only regret is that I haven't yet devised a way to integrate an opportunity for reflection into the hunt. I would like the students to think about the strategies they used to discover the items on their lists and why those strategies are important for their learning. A structured educational moment *does* occur at the conclusion of the scavenger hunt, where we examine the items left on the list that the students did not discover or had trouble locating and I demonstrate to the students where in the libraries they would find the missing items.

Information literacy is not the only area in which I provide instruction to the students. I also regularly hold workshops on media literacy. Once per semester, I teach workshops on video-sharing sites. Students learn how to search for and use video clips from YouTube and other sites and how to integrate those clips into class presentations. We

discuss parameters such as copyright and fair use, and I teach the students how to recognize political and cultural bias in the perspectives that are represented in the video clips. Additionally, I teach them that YouTube is not the only video-sharing site available, and point them to other sites that are equally useful and provide video sharing and international news clips.

I have also collaborated with the professional staff member who manages the closed-circuit television broadcasts for the residence halls. University Housing maintains a closed-circuit television channel whose broadcasts reach the approximately 10,000 students who live in the residence halls and apartments as a way to convey important information, such as room contracts for summer break housing, meal plan options, and upcoming hall programs and recreational activities. University Housing purchases feature films from distribution companies for broadcast over the closed-circuit channel, with students selecting the films through special requests. I help the resident advisors select films to complement their programs, particularly if they want to use a film to frame a critical discussion on social issues. University Housing tries to avoid broadcasting a film more than once in a three-year period, and some films prove popular choices among resident advisors (such as the movie "Crash" for facilitating a discussion about race and race relations). To minimize repetition in the film selections, I research movies with similar themes that could be acceptable substitutes for facilitating such programs.

As a librarian embedded in the residence halls, I've had the unique opportunity to engage the students socially and educationally. There are substantial opportunities for teaching information literacy to students in environments that are not wholly connected to the classroom experience but are instead relevant to the context of their daily living experiences. However, creating such opportunities requires creativity, flexibility, and a significant investment of personal time to be present in the

students' lives and recreational activities. It is also important for me to remain connected with the librarians affiliated with the University Library. Such a connection helps ensure that lessons for information literacy remain a consistent experience for the students as they receive instruction sessions with the Library's liaisons to the students' academic departments as well as in the residence halls.

### **Outreach to Under-represented Students**

Teaching information literacy to the students in the residence halls is only one dimension of my role as the Residential Life Librarian. The University of Illinois is a diverse campus, and the first-year students who traditionally make up the majority of the students living in University Housing represent a greater breadth of diversity than the upper-division students. Approximately 22% of the first-year students self-identify as Asian or Asian American, 8% as Latino/a, 7% as African American, and 12% as international students.<sup>14</sup> African American and Latino/a undergraduate students have a significantly higher rate of attrition than their White and Asian peers at white-majority institutions, with as many as 50–70% leaving white-majority colleges and universities before they reach their fourth year of study.<sup>15</sup> Many African American and Latino/a students report pressure from families to study at an institution close to home, greater issues with college affordability, and negative experiences with institutional racism.<sup>16</sup> While the reasons for their departures from the University of Illinois are shared only anecdotally amongst university faculty and staff, the proportion of African American and Latino/a students who leave the university by their fourth year of study appear to mirror national trends.<sup>17</sup>

Concerned about the high rate of attrition of under-represented groups of undergraduate students nationally and at the University of Illinois, I emphasize outreach to under-represented students as part of my mission as an embedded librarian. I have asked myself the questions, “What can

librarians do to help create a sense of belonging for under-represented students? Are libraries contributing to institutional racism? If librarians and other professionals who provide academic support demonstrate that we care about the students' success, will the rate of attrition decline?” I concluded that as an embedded librarian who enjoyed greater access to the students' lives outside the classroom, I was well positioned to understand better the college experience of our under-represented students and help remove the barriers that impede their academic success.

While it is important to be visible in the lives of the students in the residence halls, I must be even more highly visible to the students who belong to under-represented groups. Building a sense of trust with the students is paramount. I attend student organization meetings, social functions, and guest speaker lectures. If a student wins an award for an accomplishment or receives recognition from the university, I make sure that I attend the event to cheer the student on. One of my strongest relationships with the under-represented students on campus has developed with La Casa, a cultural center dedicated to serving our Latino/a students. Once per semester, the cultural center invites a librarian from the University Library and me to a pizza lunch sponsored by the center. (The center staff call this a “Lunch and Learn.”) The other librarian and I provide a fifteen-minute talk on the University Library and the residence hall libraries' resources and services, and we answer any questions the students might have about the libraries. The other librarian and I always bring new concerns back to the University Library and to the Student Affairs Division for their consideration. One year, the University Library canceled its subscriptions to Spanish language popular magazines and newspapers. The students who attended our “Lunch and Learn” at La Casa explained to us that the subscriptions' cancellation deprived a minority of students of the ability to read recreational materials in their native language and thus sent an unintended message to



the Latino/a student community that their presence was not particularly valued by the University Library. Armed with this information, the library quickly purchased Spanish language popular magazines again and prominently showcased them in visible areas of the library.

The students at La Casa also reported that many of them attended primary and secondary schools without libraries or grew up in immigrant families where the parents had received little formal education themselves. As a consequence, libraries were not part of their educational experience. Whereas other students might have been encouraged to visit the library by their parents when they called home to express their frustration with school assignments, the parents of students at La Casa did not. “We simply do not think about going to the library. We’re not sure what the Library is supposed to do for us,” I’m often told by the students during my visits to La Casa.

Students and staff at La Casa appreciated the dedicated outreach they received, and we realized that we needed to devote more attention to building awareness of the libraries amongst our Latino/a students who may not participate in La Casa’s programs. As a result, I staffed a booth along with a Spanish-speaking colleague from the University Library at Latino Family Day, an informational session held in Chicago and designed to educate Latino high school students and their parents on the breadth of services available at the University of Illinois. We answered questions from parents and students about how the libraries support academic pursuits and resources for tutoring, but most importantly we made contact with prospective students and their families at a very early stage of their educational journey—hopefully laying the foundation for a strong relationship with the University Library before they were even registered for classes.

Sometimes the nature of my outreach efforts is shaped directly by the students themselves. An officer of a student organization for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) students that

meets regularly in the residence halls approached me and said that the LGBT students had noted the visible minority groups on campus enjoyed attention from academic support services such as the library, but LGBT students—who surely face their own unique and complex set of challenges on college campuses—had no such rapport. I was subsequently asked to consider forging a relationship with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center to provide regular outreach hours for the students who congregate there as their cultural space on campus. As a consequence, I hold office hours there. I bring a laptop and am available for several hours each Wednesday afternoon for research consultations.

At first, the students who frequent the LGBT Resource Center made only small talk with me, but asked me why a librarian is spending time in their space. I explained what librarians can do for the students, and that I am there because I want to help the students who associate with the LGBT Resource Center have a librarian dedicated to their academic support. I have found that instead of being focused on academic research, much of the assistance I lend to the students at the LGBT Resource Center facilitates the exploration of their identity—helping them locate health and legal information within the local community and teaching them to search the library’s catalog more effectively for LGBT literature and history.

Providing outreach to under-represented students on the campus was never a formal expectation for me as an embedded librarian. In a way, outreach was a natural growth from my work serving the students who live in the residence halls as I noted the educational inequity that appears to exist between groups of students on the campus. Crafting outreach opportunities was less difficult with the LGBT students, who invited my presence and whose identities as LGBT students were not necessarily visible to others. Therefore my status as an “outsider” to the group was less of a concern. The other under-represented student groups, how-

ever, noted immediately that I did not share their cultural identity. Building a sense of trust with the students required a significantly greater period of time before they saw me as a genuine ally and someone who demonstrated an earnest commitment to their success as students at the University of Illinois.

### **Not all Fun and Games**

Providing instruction that is not connected to a class or academic discipline is not easy. I am challenged to invent sessions that are interesting and will appeal to a wide audience of students. If the instruction session is not immediately useful or is simply uninteresting, students will not attend. I have learned not to advertise my workshops as “developing your research skills” or anything that sounds remotely academic—students will not come. They will come, however, if what they are learning is fun and different. I have to figure out how to disguise information literacy as something that happens not just in the classroom, but also in their everyday lives. I am also challenged to re-invent my workshops frequently. My workshop “Become an Editor on Wikipedia!” was hugely popular four years ago, but interest from the students has steadily declined. Students are increasingly savvy about using social networking sites, and Wikipedia’s exponential growth has left many students feeling as if “everything is already written—so why should I contribute to it?,” as one student told me. I have to truly stay on top of my game and understand youth culture to find innovative ways for introducing information literacy into their lives.

Remaining unaffiliated with a class or academic discipline is a significant disadvantage for assessment. I am not receiving formal feedback from the students; there is no evaluation form to distribute at the end of the workshop—doing so dispels the idea that the workshop is fun, not learning. With the exception of the instructors who invite me to teach traditional instruction sessions with the

classes associated with the living-learning communities, I am unable to follow up with instructors to determine if the skills I teach are translating to increased performance in the classroom. It is possible that students have difficulty making the connections between applying the same skills to academic pursuits as they do to personal endeavors. Nonetheless, the lessons I have learned for teaching information literacy successfully outside of an academic class or discipline are, “Make it fun, make it interactive, and make it relevant.”

Successful performance as a librarian embedded in the residence halls is difficult to measure. I justify my position’s existence with the number of information literacy sessions I teach, headcounts of the sessions and other activities I facilitate, and the gate count and circulation statistics of the residence hall libraries I manage. Anecdotal evidence is, however, the most compelling evidence accepted by University Housing. I include notes and e-mails from students who thank me for my assistance in helping them develop thesis statement, finding sources for them, or simply stopping by their room in the residence hall to answer questions as they work on a paper late at night. Such appreciation demonstrates that embedded librarianship is providing academic support and instruction in a way that is fundamentally non-traditional for librarians.

The challenges associated with outreach to special populations as an embedded librarian are similar to the challenges associated with teaching information literacy. Assessment is difficult to quantify. Which is more important: the number of students who seek my assistance through the outreach venues, the quality and depth of the assistance I provide, or the value that the students attach to my presence and availability? It just might be possible that I helped demonstrate to an under-represented student that the university cares about that student’s success.

Embedding a librarian in the residence halls is not going to be an overnight success. Building a

rapport with the students is paramount for a successful experience. The venture will not work unless the students know that I am there, understand my reason for being there, or value my presence. I spend a significant amount of time thinking about creative ways to market my services and embed myself into students' daily lives in a meaningful way. Unlike traditional librarianship, where the librarian may wait at a reference desk for a student to come them, I go to the students. My success is dependent on being available to the students at the times when they are most likely to be in the residence halls—and that means many evenings and weekends spent in the halls. Too many evening and weekend commitments can make it difficult to balance the committee meetings and other professional obligations that are inevitably scheduled during traditional work hours. Finding a work/life balance and maintaining a high energy level can be challenging.

## Conclusion

The practice of an embedded librarian in university residence halls is not a new concept. Residence hall libraries and librarians have existed in various forms since the 1920s but declined in number

through the decades. As embedded librarianship emerges (or re-emerges) at many colleges and universities, perhaps the idea of librarians working principally in the residence halls will be revisited and reinvigorated.

My position is sometimes professionally isolating, as I have one foot in the University Library and one foot in the Student Affairs Division. As a full member of neither, I must be an active participant in my own professional development and stay abreast of changes to the University Library's catalog, resources, and curricula for information literacy. However it is a very rewarding experience to participate in the daily lives of the students and demonstrate that information literacy skills can play a strong part in their everyday living environment. Developing programs to engage the students requires building knowledge of the students' culture and emerging technologies and a willingness to continually update and experiment with my techniques. If there is a lesson that I can impart to other colleges and universities considering developing an embedded librarian program in the university residence halls, it is "Make it fun, make it interactive, and make it relevant!"

---

## Notes

1. Kenneth Morgan, "The Harvard House Libraries." *Library Journal* 56, no. 6 (1931): 536–539.
2. *Ibid.*, 538.
3. Edmund Griffith Williamson, "Students' Residences: Shelter or Education?" *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 36, no. 2 (1957): 386–397.
4. Edward B Stanford, "Residence Hall Libraries and Their Educational Potential." *College and Research Libraries* 30, no. 3 (1969): 197–203.
5. Williamson, "Students' Residences," 397.
6. Gail Oltmanns, "Purposes and uses of residence hall libraries." *College & Research Libraries* 46, no. 2 (1985): 172–77.
7. David Alan Flynn, "There's No Place Like Home: A History of Residence Hall Libraries at Indiana University." *Indiana Libraries* 12, no.1 (1993): 2–10.
8. Flynn, "There's No Place Like Home," 7.
9. University of Illinois, *Residence Hall Libraries Annual Report*, 1978.
10. University of Illinois, *Residence Hall Libraries Annual Report*, 1993.
11. Eric Jennings, "Using Wikipedia to Teach Information Literacy." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 15, no. 4 (2008): 432–437.
12. Carolyn H. Funes, "Palomar College Develops an Information Literacy Course." *Community & Junior College Libraries* 12, no. 3 (2005): 61–65.
13. Susan R. Komives, "The Relationship of Hall Directors' Transformational and Transactional Leadership Factors to Resi-

dent Assistant's Perceived Outcomes." *Journal of College Student Development* 32, no. 6 (2001): 509–515.

14. University of Illinois, New Freshman Demographics Fall 2009. Available at: <http://www.dmi.illinois.edu/stuenr/index.asp#new>. (Accessed March 22, 2010).

15. Sue R. Rankin and Robert D. Reason, "Differing Perceptions: How Students of Color and White Students Perceive Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups." *Journal of College Student Development* 46, no. 1 (2005): 43–61.

16. Ibid.

17. University of Illinois, New Freshman Demographics Fall 2009

---

## References

Flynn, David Alan. "There's No Place Like Home: A History of Residence Hall Libraries at Indiana University." *Indiana Libraries* 12, no.1 (1993): 2–10.

Funes, Carolyn H. "Palomar College Develops an Information Literacy Course." *Community & Junior College Libraries* 12, no. 3 (2005): 61–65.

Jennings, Eric. "Using Wikipedia to Teach Information Literacy." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 15, no. 4 (2008): 432–437.

Komives, Susan R. The Relationship of Hall Directors' Transformational and Transactional Leadership Factors to Resident Assistant's Perceived Outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development* 32, no. 6 (2001): 509–515.

Morgan, Kenneth. "The Harvard House Libraries." *Library Journal* 56, no. 6 (1931): 536–539.

Oltmanns, Gail. "Purposes and uses of residence hall libraries." *College & Research Libraries* 46, no. 2 (1985): 172–77.

Rankin, Sue R., and Robert D. Reason. "Differing Perceptions: How Students of Color and White Students Perceive Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups." *Journal of College Student Development* 46, no. 1 (2005): 43–61.

Stanford, Edward B. "Residence Hall Libraries and Their Educational Potential." *College and Research Libraries* 30, no. 3 (1969): 197–203.

University of Illinois, *Residence Hall Libraries Annual Report*, 1978.

University of Illinois, *Residence Hall Libraries Annual Report*, 1993.

University of Illinois, New Freshman Demographics Fall 2009. Available at: <http://www.dmi.illinois.edu/stuenr/index.asp#new>. (Accessed March 22, 2010).

Williamson, Edmund Griffith. "Students' Residences: Shelter or Education?" *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 36, no. 2 (1957): 386–397.