

Crossroads community: strengthening the Maritime Academy through library scholarship, tradition, service and access.

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Abstract

The principles of *scholarship, tradition, service* and *access* have historically dominated the forefront of academic library operations. The study “Crossroads Community: Strengthening the Maritime Academy through Library Scholarship, Tradition, Service and Access”, demonstrates how the Stephen B. Luce Library of SUNY Maritime College applies these principles to cultivate successful partnerships across the maritime community. Departing from the old metaphor, “*the Library, the Heart of the University*” and by adopting a new metaphor “*Crossroads Community*” the Stephen B. Luce library study serves as a model for incorporating the operational definitions of library centrality across the maritime academic community and the maritime industry. Therefore, the four principles of library centrality: *scholarship, tradition, service* and *access*, serve as a compass for the systematic integration of partnerships with students, teaching faculty, the college governance system, the office of admissions, alumni, the maritime industry, local communities, local government and the State University of New York of which Maritime College is a part. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that successful implementation of academic library centrality strengthens the entire maritime community and in the process enhances the mission of the institution.

1 Introduction

For decades libraries stood supreme as cultural icons of the academic community with an historic mission to provide a learning space that inspired interaction with books, ideas and people. Universities endowed the libraries with the noblest buildings, centrally located in the heart of the campus. Inspired by architectural designs, the buildings fostered knowledge; added mystique to the collections and prestige to the academy. The librarians provided authoritative information and collection development lay at the heart of the library’s primary purpose. Faculty and students learned to associate the library with its physical collections. Students used the library as a study hall and as venue for accessing their course materials. Occasionally, library users would ask

basic questions that sometimes led to teachable moments which gave birth to the instructional role of the academic library. The “*library was the heart of the university*”; that was the metaphor which guided the role and the traditions of academic libraries for many years.

SUNY Maritime College is one of the 64 colleges and universities of the State University of New York system. A four-year college located at historic Fort Schuyler in Throggs Neck, New York, it offers a solid academic program coupled with a structured cadet life in the regiment for both men and women. SUNY Maritime College prepares students for careers through a content-centered curricula and a hands-on, team building approach to learning. Maritime offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, 23 varsity athletic teams, summer training cruises to Europe, United States Coast Guard license and intern programs (SUNY Maritime College Website 2008).

The Stephen B. Luce Library of SUNY Maritime College is accredited by professional organizations such as the Middle State Commission on Higher Education and it adheres to the standards and guidelines of the Association of the College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association (American Library Association 2008). The Luce Library is the oldest academic maritime library serving the community of the oldest maritime academy in the United States, -SUNY Maritime College - founded in 1874. The Library’s collections and resources support the research requirements of the maritime disciplines in engineering, science and the humanities.

2 Building a Framework for Academic Library Centrality

The concept of centrality is used by academic units to determine their relevance and the degree to which they contribute to the mission of their institution (Grimes 1998). In many institutions, collaborations and partnerships among different departments, not only enhances the mission of the institution but it also contributes to the success in achieving individual department goals. The concept of “centrality” was further developed by the neoclassical school of organization theory. The neoclassical school of organization theory also promoted the idea that successful organizations do not have “one best way” of achieving their goals and objectives. The constant change is a result of environmental influences which can affect organizational processes, priorities and structure (Grimes 1998). Therefore, “one best way” of achieving goals and objectives is not always the most effective way.

Although the “*the library, the heart of the university*” guided the role of the academic libraries for many decades, in reality the role of the library within the academic organization is far from what the metaphor seems to suggest. Anne Woodsworth states that “competition for funds [on university campuses] has intensified to the point that what was once a universal good (the library) is now perceived as just one more support service that must cost less and produce more ...” (Woodsworth 1989). The metaphor “*the library is the heart of the*

university” is often a misleading interpretation of the real relationships between the library and the academic community (Grimes 1998). Ironically, the old metaphor “*the library the heart of the university*” became less effective for academic library administrators who constantly negotiate and navigate the library’s position within the new academic framework. Therefore, it became necessary for library administrators to move away from the sentimental stereotypes in order to redefine the library’s organizational relationships within the academic community.

In order to promote a more realistic understanding of the academic library’s role within the academic community, it became necessary for the Stephen B. Luce Library to make a considerable effort to abandon the old sentimental metaphor, “*the library the heart of the university*”. The departure from the old metaphor and the transition required a considerable effort, of “change of thought”, and “change of culture”. Transitioning the library organization also required the Luce Library universally to adopt the four principles of library centrality: *scholarship, tradition, service* and *access* at all levels of the library’s organizational operations. Subsequently, the four definitions, *scholarship, tradition, service* and *access* became the operational structure and the backbone of the Luce Library organization.

3 “Crossroads Community” – the premise

In October 2005, the Stephen B. Luce Library had the opportunity to present its vision and strategic direction to the SUNY Maritime College Council. The SUNY Maritime College Council is an external board of practitioners and educators from the maritime industry and education; the college council serves as an advisory board to the SUNY Maritime College’s leadership. The Luce Library presented its strategic direction through a document titled “*Beyond the Library Stacks*” (2005). “*Beyond the Library Stacks*” demonstrated the role of the Stephen B. Luce librarians as educators, researchers, collection specialists, curators, technology specialists, student-advisors and members of the faculty. The report also presented numerical data regarding the library’s statistics on operations, usage and instruction. More importantly, the report “*Beyond the Library Stacks*” outlined the vision and position of the library as it relates to the maritime academy and the maritime community at large.

The premise of the “*Beyond the Library Stacks*” report was to present the Stephen B. Luce Library’s new organizational identity. The library’s new organizational identity also introduced a new metaphor and a new concept: “*Crossroads Community*”. The metaphor “*Crossroads Community*” was first used in Deborah Grimes’ book “*Academic Library Centrality*” (Grimes 1998). The term “crossroads” is defined as the place where people congregate, discussions are conversed, activities take place and decisions are made. The term “community” implies a unity of connections, services, people, and resources. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, community is “a body of

people organized in a municipal or social unity”. This is a most appropriate definition for a dynamic organization, such as the Luce Library, which is associated with such a strong maritime community with common historical, cultural heritage and rich traditions.

3.1 “Crossroads Community” – the practice

Organizational theories are at best implemented when the members of the organization associate principles and abstract concepts with their visible and tangible surroundings. Using symbolism to represent organizational ideas often becomes a motivation and an inspiration. “Symbols embody and express an organization’s culture – the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices and artifacts that define for members who they are and how they are to do things. Culture is both a product and a process.” (Bolman, Lee G. and Terrence E. Deal 1997 p.219).

The task of building a framework around the four principles of library centrality – *scholarship, tradition, service* and *access* – and the subsequent task of adopting and implementing the new metaphor “*crossroads community*,” raised the need for an organizational inspiration; a host that would encapsulate the essence of the above principles and the new metaphor of the “*crossroads community*”.

Keeping in mind Bolman’s theory of organizational symbolism, the Luce Library searched for symbols that embodied and expressed its organizational culture. The object was quickly identified as an architectural design in the center of the Stephen B. Luce Library building. This architectural element is one of a Compass Rose. It marks the center of the north side of a massive granite structure, Fort Schuyler, that houses the library wing. This beautifully designed compass rose was constructed during the Work Progress Administration (WPA) project at the time when Fort Schuyler was restored as the New York State Maritime Academy in 1934 (presently known as SUNY Maritime College). More importantly this compass rose was constructed by the grandfather of a SUNY Maritime College graduate. The compass rose and its four cardinal points North, South, East and West became the inspiration of the ideas developed and presented in the “*Beyond the Library Stacks*” report [figure 1]. The four principles of library centrality (*scholarship, tradition, service and access*) became the four cardinal points for the systematic integration of partnerships with students, faculty, college governance, the office of admissions, alumni, the maritime industry, local communities, local government, and the State University System of New York.

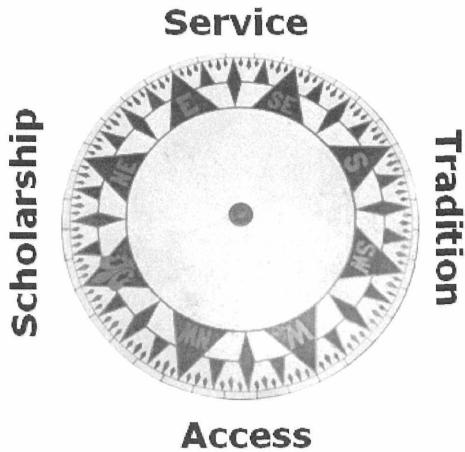


Figure 1

Reflecting on the Stephen B. Luce Library mission statement and shared institutional vision, the library was able to identify its community. Students, teaching faculty and staff, the summer sea term shipboard community (students, faculty, staff), the local district community, college governance system, the office of admissions, alumni, the maritime industry, scholars and researchers, local government and the State University of New York [figure 2] became the Library's "crossroads community". Like the cardinal points of the compass rose, the Luce Library pointed its resources and services in all directions to empower the community with the four principles of library centrality (*scholarship, tradition, service and access*). For each member of the "crossroads community" the library set forth a strategic plan to promote *scholarship, tradition, service and access* in a way that best serves the community.

Library Centrality

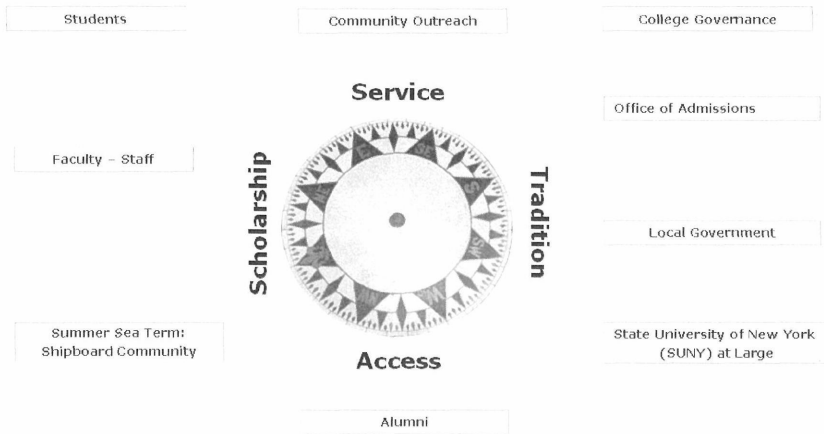


Figure 2

4 Empowering the Crossroads Community with Scholarship, Tradition, Service and Access

In the early 1990's digital technology entered the world of libraries and set forth a revolution not only in the way libraries store and transmit the recorded knowledge but also in the way people communicate and in the way they seek to gain access to information. The library space began to change to accommodate the delivery and access of digital resources, but more importantly, the librarians understood the implications of the digital learning space, and have reshaped the library to accommodate this new style of learning. The Digital Age also introduced a major shift in library instruction and pedagogy. The approach of academic library instruction has shifted from transmitting knowledge to emphasizing construction of understanding. The Digital Age, the Internet and access to scholarly resources made it impossible for library educators to transmit and teach universal knowledge. Instead, librarians developed pedagogical approaches that enabled the library community to use critical thinking and construct their own understanding of universal knowledge.

The Luce Library provides access to the maritime community from the library's physical space and virtually from any part of the world. The library's collections encompass a well-rounded maritime collection of approximately 90,000 print volumes. The collection presents special strength in marine engineering, naval architecture, marine transportation, oceanography, transportation economics and management, and meteorology.

The library subscribes to specialized print maritime magazines and journals. It also contains special collections such as the vertical files known as the *Marifiles* comprised with loose-leaf information on the maritime industry, and the *Technical Reports* of approximately 4,000 recent maritime-oriented research reports in paper and microfiche format, with emphasis on research cited in Government Reports Announcements (GRA) and the NTIS Selected Research in Microfiche (SRIM). The *Maritime History* collection is a collection of classic texts on nautical education and historical treatises on marine engineering, marine transportation, maritime labor, the merchant marine and naval architecture. The Luce Library is also a *Government Depository* library, with a selective scope in maritime related documents; items received include nautical charts, sailing directions, and US Coast Guard and MARAD (Maritime Administration) publications. *The Ship's Library* is a selective collection of some 3,000 print volumes, and supports the college's Summer Sea Term academic program during the annual training cruise of the T.S. EMPIRE STATE VI. The Luce Library is known for its impressive *Archival Collections* that document Maritime History since 1700s with notable collections such as the Journals of Proceedings, Minutes of the Standing Committee, Treasurer's Account and Minutes of the Annual Meetings of the *Marine Society of the City of New York*; the journals, reports, daybooks and letters of the *Sailor's Snug Harbor* and the pilotage books, daybooks and logs of the *Sandy Hook Pilots Association*.

In addition to the print resources available to the Maritime community, the Stephen B. Luce Library subscribes to 6,470,181 full text articles indexed in a total of 1,602,860 electronic records and journal titles. Furthermore, the Luce Library has access to 21,752 electronic books (SUNYConnect 2008). The majority of electronic resources are available through the State University of New York library consortium, SUNYConnect.

The delivery of the library's digital resources and electronic services is through a digital research portal, (Stephen B. Luce Library 2008). The library team has developed a curriculum-aligned digital portal for delivering research, information, and access to online course research guides, and to other digital learning modules.

The librarians work closely with students, faculty and staff to provide access and research support for all the maritime specialized and general collections, including the historical and archival collections. The library continues to methodically digitize its archival collections in order to provide users with wider intellectual access to rare documents. Digital access to the library's rare documents not only makes the content of primary sources available for scholarly research but also enhances the students' sense of inquiry, history and maritime traditions. In addition, the library supports the curriculum with course-material placed on reserve. All maritime affiliated members may take advantage of the library's national and international partnerships and

request any resource which may be available in any library in the United States through interlibrary loan services.

Librarian outreach is at the forefront of library operations. The librarians collaborate with the teaching faculty to construct the knowledge of understanding and the critical thinking component of the maritime curriculum through the library's information literacy program. Library faculty and teaching faculty work closely to promote the use of digital databases to students and to integrate the library's resources into the maritime curriculum. The librarians provide online and in-person research consultation to all members of the crossroads community (alumni, maritime industry, local and New York State-wide communities). The Library's information literacy program is designed to develop students' skills at various levels of curriculum competencies. Starting with the Freshman, all incoming students receive their first library orientation session. Upper level students are taught discipline-specific sessions in English composition, American History and American Civilization, General Science, Marine Biology, Oceanography, Meteorology, Business and Economics and Engineering.

The work of the librarians extends to several college-wide and state-wide committees. As members of the College Governance, the Luce Librarians participate in department level curriculum planning activities meaningfully to integrate the library's resources and information literacy into the student learning experiences. They serve in college-wide assessment activities that result in improvement of resources, communication and educational approaches for students, faculty, staff, and alumni. These activities are especially relevant to the college's accreditation and program review reports.

During the two months of the summer sea term, the library transfers relevant collections onboard the Training Ship Empire State VI, and a library faculty member serves as the Ship's librarian. In support of the shipboard community (students, faculty and staff) the library provides resource and research support for the courses and curricula taught at sea.

The library also works closely with the Office of Admissions to conduct library tours for all visitors, prospective students and their families. During library tours visitors learn about the library's collection and scholarship, the history and the maritime traditions of the college, about all types of services and access offered to the students and the maritime community.

The Luce Library responds to the local and New York State government with access to its federal government documents collections. As part of the State University System of New York, the Luce Library is an active participant in the decision making regarding resource and cost sharing for collections and services among 64 SUNY colleges and universities.

The diagram, "Crossroads Community: Service-Tradition-Scholarship-Access" [figure 3] demonstrates the areas where the four principles of library centrality are systematically integrated within the "*Crossroads Community*".

Crossroads Community

Service – Tradition – Scholarship -- Access

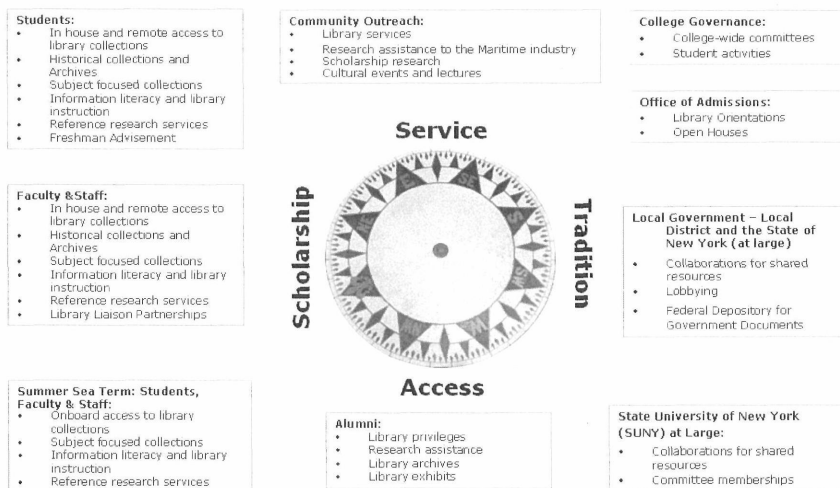


Figure 3

5 Conclusion

The Luce Library compass rose was concealed under a floor carpet for fifty years until a SUNY Maritime College alumnus and a member of the Marine Transportation Department faculty arranged to have the compass rose uncovered in 1974. Library sources tell us that it was perhaps done for the centennial celebrations of the restoration of Fort Schuyler. Centrally located in the middle of the library floor, the compass rose attracts the attention of many who pause to admire its lyrical form and the proud craftsmanship with which it was once made. The library staff eagerly tells the story of the compass rose; it is a part of their living history, interwoven in the library’s organizational soul. Organizations may choose to keep symbols concealed; the Luce Library made a conscious decision to incorporate the story and the symbolism of the compass rose with its organizational objectives. So there is much to gain and so much to share when organizations choose to preserve their history by revealing their history and by reinterpreting its symbols.

The Stephen B. Luce Library has come to appreciate that library centrality is not achieved by a way of being the “heart of the university”, or by being the central building on campus. Library centrality is achieved by decentralizing the core and the essence of the library organization; it is achieved by decentralizing the four principals of scholarship, maritime institutional tradition, service and access, to reach out to the maritime community. Scholarship and practice has

proven that there is no “one best way” of achieving one’s organizational objectives. The maritime community is dynamic and diverse; therefore the library as an organization must be dynamic and diverse. Strengthening the maritime community requires a consistent effort of disseminating organizational access and assets to meet the needs of the community. The Stephen B. Luce Library of SUNY Maritime College Library continues to change; it morphs and evolves to become who the maritime community is and it travels to be where the maritime community is, ... at the *crossroads*.

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