



4-18-2013

## Closing the Book on Libraries? Challenging the Idea That Libraries are Obsolete and Discovering Why They are More Important Now than Ever Before

Kayla Hampton  
Western Michigan University, smile\_8\_9@msn.com

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### Recommended Citation

Hampton, Kayla, "Closing the Book on Libraries? Challenging the Idea That Libraries are Obsolete and Discovering Why They are More Important Now than Ever Before" (2013). *Honors Theses*. 2244.  
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Researchers are currently developing in-home 3D printers that are able to layer multiple materials into one object, a front door embedded with a camera and facial recognition software that makes keys unnecessary, and a self-aware fridge that has the ability to “suggest” a recipe based on which ingredients are nearing their expiration dates (Tynan-Wood). To claim that we live in a technologically advanced age comes dangerously close to stating the obvious, but knowledge of that fact never ceases to make the development of the “next best thing” any less enticing or desirable to consumers. Of course, with each new product that is made available to buyers, the list of items that have become obsolete grows each year. VCRs, public payphones, and floppy disks are only a few examples of once oft-used objects that have gone by the wayside in recent decades, and many people feel that it is time for public libraries to be added to this lengthy list.

The manner in which humans obtain information and consume books and other reading materials has changed greatly over time due to the invention of the Internet and devices such as eBook readers. As a result, many people are questioning whether library facilities are still necessary parts of society. However, even though one may no longer have to trek to the library to do research for an assignment or have to travel to a bookstore or their local library to obtain a book that they wish to read, in these economically troubled times, libraries are actually more necessary than ever. While the face of public libraries has changed since the resource’s inception, they continue to play a key role in the lives of many people, as librarians and library patrons will attest. Susan Hildreth, the director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, said in the American Library Association’s 2012 “State of America’s Libraries Report,” “People

depend on libraries now more than ever. Not only do visits and circulation continue to rise, the role of public libraries in providing Internet resources to the public continues to increase as well” (“State of America’s Libraries”). There is no doubt that society is changing in many ways that affect libraries, but, rather than simply becoming obsolete, libraries are reconstructing and adapting to the changing times so they can continue to meet the public’s needs.

### **The Past**

When the creation of libraries is mentioned, Egypt, Greece and the library of Alexandria often come to mind, but the unique history of public libraries is far more complex than these three well-known components. As Lionel Casson writes in his book *Libraries in the Ancient World*, “It was in Egypt and Mesopotamia [...] that civilization arose. And it is there that we find the earliest examples of that key feature of civilization, writing: inscribed clay tablets that date shortly before 3000 B.C. have been discovered among the archeological remains of the Sumerians, a gifted people settled in southern Mesopotamia” (Casson 1). These libraries found in the ancient Near East, while important to the institution’s history, are quite different from the libraries available today.

Libraries providing communities with many books on a variety of subjects were introduced by the Greeks. In an article on the history of libraries written for *History Magazine*, Barbara Krasner-Khait says, “Public and private libraries [in Greece] flourished through a well-established process: authors wrote on a variety of subjects, scriptoria or copy shops produced the books, and book dealers sold them. Copying books was an exacting business and one in high demand, because a book’s trustworthiness translated into quality” (Krasner-Khait). By the

fourth century B.C., the prerequisites for the creation of a public library had been met: works on a wide variety of subjects were available, mass-producing copies of books was possible, and dealers were willing to sell copies of those books (Casson 28). Casson writes:

In the latter half of the century, there were two events that directly affected the first public library on record [...]. One was the creation by Aristotle of a large personal library [...]. The second event was a unique decree passed by the Athenian government that bears on a key function of the sort of library that the Greeks aimed at attaining, namely, to serve as a repository of trustworthy copies. (Casson 28-29)

The Greeks took great pains to achieve excellence in their early library endeavors and their hard work served as a model for the Ptolemies, the final dynasty of Egyptian pharaohs whose originator was a Greek by birth. The Ptolemies based their capital in Alexandria, Egypt, and founded the library of Alexandria around 300 B.C.

“The library of Alexandria was the first of its kind, and throughout ancient history remained the greatest of its kind,” said Casson (Casson 31). The library was open to those with the necessary scholarly qualifications and literacy and its goal was to obtain 500,000 scrolls. Most of the books were purchased from markets in Athens, Rhodes and other Mediterranean cities, but Krasner-Khait writes that some of the texts may have been obtained using unethical means. “Some stories relate that they confiscated any book not already in the library from passengers arriving in Alexandria. [...] Ptolemy III deceived Athenian authorities when they let

him borrow original manuscripts by keeping the originals and sending the copies back” (Krasner-Khait). At the height of the library’s success, it held nearly 750,000 scrolls. Fire and plundering attacks during the Roman period eventually destroyed the library, but thousands of scrolls were shipped to Rome at the urging of Cleopatra (Krasner-Khait). Even though it ended in ruin, the library of Alexandria was considered the intellectual capital of the world and it provided a model for future libraries.

By the middle of the second century B.C., Rome was also making strides towards developing a public library. After Julius Caesar’s dreams of establishing a public library were dashed by his assassination, Asinius Pollio obtained enough money to make Caesar’s visions a reality (Krasner-Khait). The library that Pollio created was markedly different from the previously established libraries and was similar in many ways to the libraries that are available today.

The library was divided into two sections—one for Greek and one for Latin [...]. Books, typically acquired through donations by authors and others, as well as through copying, were placed along the walls and readers consulted them in the middle of the room. This marked a distinct departure from the Greek model, where readers could only consult their books in an atrium away from the rest of the collection. (Krasner-Khait)

By 14 A.D., there were three major libraries in Rome: Pollio’s, one in the Porticus of Octavia, and Augustus’ on the Paletine Hill, and they remained exclusive places for educated people and scholars. However, the other members of the population had to look no further than their local

bath house if they wished to enjoy a book. “At the baths, men and women, rich and poor, could take a bath, meet with friends, play ball—and read a book. Libraries were added to the baths until the third century” (Krasner-Khait). Unfortunately, as the Roman Empire began to fall, the future of libraries was uncertain and the Roman people began to wonder if all of the time and effort that had been devoted to improving libraries was for naught. As historian Ammianus Marcellinus said in 378 A.D., “The libraries are closing forever, like tombs” (Krasner-Khait).

Even though the libraries in the Western Roman Empire were in ruins, the spread of Christianity and monasticism in the eastern half of the empire created a renewed passion for learning amongst the Roman people. The Benedictines built and organized several libraries and the practice of loaning works to other monasteries became commonplace. Thus, interlibrary loan was created (Krasner-Khait). Charlemagne also mandated that each school must have its own scriptorium. As the thirst for knowledge experienced a renaissance, Europeans turned to the designs of previous libraries, such as those of the Greeks and Romans, for inspiration in reviving libraries. Johannes Gutenberg’s moveable type creation in the 1400s allowed for handwritten manuscripts to be replaced by printed books. With the face of libraries changing so rapidly, combining new innovations with past successes, it is not surprising that the popularity of libraries exploded during the 1600s and 1700s (Krasner-Khait).

The oldest library in the United States resembles the libraries that the American public is familiar with today in many ways. The Harvard Library, which began with a donation of 400 books from John Harvard, a Massachusetts clergyman, is now the largest university library in the US, with more than 10,000,000 volumes (Krasner-Khait). “It wasn’t until waves of

immigration and the philosophy of free public education for children that public libraries spread in the US. The first public library in the country opened in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1833” (Krasner-Khait). From that time on, the epitome of a successful library was ingrained in the minds of Americans and libraries began to increase in both number and popularity. From 1881 to 1919, the United States gave rise to more than 1,700 public libraries (Krasner-Khait).

Even though the libraries that both flourished and deteriorated as history unfolded were faced with many challenges, the libraries of today are facing hardships that have never before been experienced by repositories of knowledge. The Romans did not have to worry about decreases in government funding despite ever-growing increases in patrons. The Greeks did not have to concern themselves with new technologies leading people to believe that the institutions are becoming obsolete and are no longer needed. Despite the differences that exist between the libraries that currently populate our communities and the libraries of yesteryear, one fact remains: a rich history surrounds libraries and the very fact that they have been a part of civilization since 3000 B.C. further proves that they cannot be easily discarded. For how many other human creations have been utilized for such a long period of time? Very few. Just like one wouldn't toss aside a clay tablet inscribed by the Sumerians simply because it has a few cracks in it, we cannot allow libraries to be ignored and forgotten simply because there are a few obstacles that need to be overcome. Many other staples of our culture, such as cars, cell phones and computers, have required adaptation in order to remain a relevant part of society and libraries are no exception. The times are changing, as they have many times before, and like any other organization or field, it is necessary for libraries to adapt, and they are making

changes in order to continue to meet the needs of their patrons. Libraries have been doing so for thousands of years. Why would they stop now?

### **The Present**

On April 18<sup>th</sup> of 2012, the Harvard Library Strategic Conversations sponsored an Oxford-style debate concerning the idea that libraries are obsolete. After the audience heard both sides speak on the issue, they voted yay or nay on the motion and the results were announced over gin and tonics at a reception later that night. The majority of the crowd had voted in favor of the continuing relevance of libraries (“Libraries are Obsolete”). While it is promising for library supporters to hear that people are in agreement with them, the fact remains that there are many others who are not. Harvard professor R. David Lankes, who was speaking in opposition at the university’s debate writes:

Libraries are obsolete because they act as institutions of remediation. Libraries were either created to fill some deficit in existing institutions, or over the years have adopted the role of remedying some deficit in the community. While this model of libraries made sense at one point, today many of these deficits no longer exist [...]. (Lankes)

It seems that there is one glaring deficit that Lankes is neglecting to take into account, and that is money. As anyone who has watched a national news program at some point during the last 10 years can tell you, there is clearly a national deficit and to say that it is affecting the American people as well is an understatement. During these economically troubling times, where else besides libraries can you turn and find free entertainment, technology, and learning



opportunities for both yourself and your children? Krista Major, a library page at the Van Buren District Library in Mattawan, Michigan, said that she commonly sees people come into the library to use the computers in order to search for jobs. “If you can’t afford to buy brand new books for your kid at the store, you can come to the library and borrow them for free,” Major said. “The activities for kids that we offer are always full and we are always busy, especially in the summer. If people don’t have money for vacations, they can come here with their families for free entertainment and stay all day” (Major).

Lankes also writes:

Many public and university libraries were created to pool and share information resources of a community [...]. These libraries filled a need in the community to increase access to a commodity that was rare and expensive. The library, in this case, was a remediation for a larger problem of access. Today this function is obsolete [...]. This is obvious to anyone who has ever been on the web. There are plenty of sites that let you share resources. (Lankes)

Lankes is correct—there are many websites that allow you to access books and other forms of information directly on one’s personal computer. The professor lists LibraryThing and Goodreads, for example, but there is also Google Books and many colleges, including Western Michigan University, have online databases that make it unnecessary to trek across campus to obtain a book for class. However, as was discussed in the previous paragraph, these handy databases and programs mean absolutely nothing to someone who is unable to access the Internet in their home. In this respect, libraries may look unnecessary to those who are able to

access the Internet from their SmartPhone or tablet in the middle of a desolate field and it is a safe bet that more people have access to the internet than those who do not. After all, we live in a world where more people have cell phones than sanitary water (“Access to Cellphones”). However, just because the majority of the population has technology literally at their fingertips at all times does not mean that we can push those who do not under the rug and pretend that something as “archaic” as a library is no longer needed by anyone. The statistics certainly do not support this belief. According to a 2012 report by from the American Library Association (“State of America’s Libraries”), “Despite real economic strain, libraries are still striving to fulfill the needs of their communities and provide technology services that range from basic computer skills to homework help, from career advice to assistance in applying for social services” (“State of America’s Libraries”). 70 percent of libraries reported an increase in the public’s Internet use last year, according to a Public Library and Funding and Technology Access Study that was conducted by Libraries Connecting Communities from 2010 to 2011. However, it was also found that 76.2 percent of libraries had an insufficient number of computers to meet the growing demand and 45.4 percent did not have Internet connection speeds that were able to match the public’s demand (“State of America’s Libraries”). This clearly poses a problem, but in several communities across the United States, grant money is allowing libraries to overcome these obstacles.

For example, in Idaho, the unemployment rate increased by more than 150 percent from 2008 to 2011. As the ALA said:

In response to job losses in manufacturing, logging, mining, and construction, the unemployed are seeking general education development (GED) degrees, computer skills, and new training to re-enter the workforce. Seventy percent of the public libraries in Idaho reported that they were the only free public Internet access points in their communities, but many said they were poorly equipped, with low bandwidth and too few computers. (“State of America’s Libraries”)

Thanks to a grant from the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program, the public libraries of Idaho were awarded with \$1.9 million (as well as matching funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Idaho Public Television) and 40 percent of the state’s libraries were able to increase bandwidth and the number of computers available to patrons. After these installations are completed, it is projected that bandwidth, computers, and the number of Internet users in the state will increase by a factor of ten (“State of America’s Libraries”). This inspiring story illustrates both the impact that a library can have upon a community as well as the fact that the problems existing within these public facilities can be fixed. Unfortunately, fixing such issues takes money and lots of it. Not all struggling libraries are fortunate enough to receive grants to that will allow them to adequately aid the community that they are trying desperately to support. And this is where the one of the biggest challenges facing libraries comes in to play: government funding.

While compiling data for the 2011-2012 report, the ALA discovered that for the third consecutive year, more than 40 percent of states reported decreased public library funding. Another study conducted by Libraries Connect Communities found that in 2011’s fiscal year, 60

percent of public libraries were struggling to operate with flat or decreased budgets and it is projected that, in 2012, that percentage will increase to 65% (“State of America’s Libraries”). Many facets of society are being affected by the difficult financial times that the United States is currently embroiled in, but it is understandably even more difficult for nonprofit institutions such as libraries. In 2011, a questionnaire distributed by the ALA sought to discover how many branches had been closed due to funding cuts. While most states found that fewer than five facilities had been closed, in Michigan alone, more than 20 libraries closed their doors. As a result of these budget cuts, many areas of the library system are suffering. Several branches have had to cut down on business hours and slash collection budgets, which is the money allotted to purchase new print and digital books, CDs, DVDs, and databases (“State of America’s Libraries”). In an attempt to combat these problems, some libraries are becoming privatized, but doing so comes with challenges as well. An article written by Matthew Preusch that appeared in the Boston Globe in 2007 describes 15 closed libraries in Jackson County, Oregon, that were able to reopen after the county discovered Library Systems and Services of Maryland, a for-profit company that was willing to run them. Even though, as the article says, a privatized library is better than no library at all, “sadly, the libraries will have fewer staff members and be open for fewer hours—only 24 hours a week at the biggest branch” (Preusch). The ALA has mixed feelings about the privatization of libraries, for in 2000, a report said that when used carefully, “outsourcing has been an effective managerial tool” (Preusch). However, just a year later, “the association adopted a policy opposing ‘the shifting of policy-making and management oversight’ from the public to the private for-profit sector’ [...] and argued that

libraries 'are an essential public good' that should remain 'directly accountable to the publics they serve'" (Preusch). Preusch himself agrees with the ALA, saying, "Public libraries do have to worry about budgets, but they shouldn't have to 'earn their keep' like a commercial bookstore. [...] Indeed, public libraries are vital pipelines. Keeping them public is the best way to keep the public informed" (Preusch). An increasing number of libraries have to make the difficult decision between closing their doors for good or becoming affiliated with a for-profit company, thereby changing the entire structure of their facility, all while trying to remain true to their loyal patrons.

Upon first glance, the future of libraries can seem uncertain and this may cause one to wonder why someone would pursue a career in a field that is constantly evolving and adapting to meet the public's demand. But to some, this is precisely what makes a job as a librarian so appealing. However, for those who find libraries to be unnecessary and increasingly irrelevant as time goes by, it also follows that they believe that careers in library science are also decreasing in importance. This couldn't be further from the truth. A common argument that individuals use to justify these feelings towards jobs in the librarianship sector is that the Internet has replaced the need for librarians. After all, if you can look anything up on Google that your heart desires, why would you need to travel to your local library to ask someone to help you attain the information you seek? Contrary to the antiquated picture some people have of a librarian simply scuttling off to the card catalog to find a customer's book for them, librarians actually play many more roles in their workplaces today and are great assets to have when one is conducting research. Jamie McKenzie of *From Now On*, an educational technology

journal, writes, “Despite the widespread notion that the Internet can replace library collections, there are times when it resembles T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*, offering scant assistance, insight or wisdom. While the Internet offers many treasures, it also confronts the erstwhile researcher with plenty of rubbish” (McKenzie). Librarians are trained researchers who know how to find the most reliable information in a short time. Some people may read this and wonder to themselves how someone could possibly not know how to find credible information easily on the Internet, but as long as students continue to obtain information from *Wikipedia* and cite it in their class research papers, this problem exists. According to Major, there are many reasons that libraries are reliable research areas and one of her rationales is that, even if you can’t find what you are looking for in a search engine, there is a good chance you will be able to find it on the shelf behind you. “The Internet is not always reliable, but when you pick up a book, you know you are getting good information” Major said. “That’s not just something that college students should know, but people of all ages” (Major). As Major points out, the Internet is indeed used by multiple generations. It is not uncommon to see a 6-year-old clicking away on a computer or a 70-year-old using an iPad. But there is a tendency in our culture to assume that everyone has prowess when navigating the Internet and this is simply not so. This is another area where librarians can provide help to those in need. For example, in the book *Teaching the Internet to in Libraries*, Rachel Singer Gordon describes the Multnomah County library in Oregon’s approach to educating the elderly about computer use through their Cyber Seniors program, Gordon writes:

[...] the library noticed a decrease in the number of senior citizens using the library. Suspecting that this drop in usage was due to a discomfort with the library's increasing reliance on computer technology, [the library] applied for a grant [...] to help bring computer and Internet instruction to local seniors. [...] In such classes, they learn computer basics, Internet searching and e-mail, the online catalog, and the library's web page. (Gordon 103)

At the other end of the spectrum, librarians also strive to make visiting the library an enjoyable experience for children and work hard to foster a love of reading in their youngest patrons that will remain with them throughout their lives. In *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development: An Evaluation Report*, Dr. Donna Celano and Dr. Susan B. Neumann wrote, "One study found that children who had been exposed to a library [program for preschoolers] showed a greater number of emergent literacy behaviors and prereading skills than did those in a control group (Celano 3). A recent survey also revealed that libraries continue to play a significant role in strengthening literacy in the United States, particularly amongst the segments of the population that are in need of special assistance in developing literacy skills, such as preschool and elementary school children (Celano 3). Summer reading programs are also present in libraries across the country, encouraging both kids and adults to remain avid readers during the warm vacation months. "43 percent of libraries said that children visit the library once a week during the summer reading program, and 75 percent said their circulation increases between 6 and 10 percent during this time," Celano and Nueman wrote (Celano 4). Major, of the Van Buren District Library, said "There are 500 or more kids who

sign up for summer reading. It gets the kids interested in reading and, oftentimes, the adults get interested in reading again, too” (Major). Summer reading programs are not only entertaining opportunities to get children to read, they are also very beneficial to their development. Besides being offered during the time of year when kid’s literacy abilities are most likely to decline, they also combat “aliteracy,” which is being able to read, but lacking the motivation (Celano 11). In addition to the many benefits and opportunities that are gained and presented to children who visit the library frequently, when parents take their children to the library, they are creating memories that will be remembered long after their kids emerge from childhood. April Peebles, a 22-year-old Western Michigan University student and an avid reader from Kalamazoo said, “I remember going to the library with my mom and my siblings. My love of reading came from my mom, who would read with us and take us to the library for summer reading. Libraries are a great place to go and it’s something fun for families to do together” (Peebles).

Despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges of inadequate resources, budget cuts, and criticism from the public, libraries continue to remain a crucial part of society. Libraries are capable of teaching people of all ages new things, providing accurate information, and bringing families together. Libraries and careers in librarianship have changed greatly over the years, but that is necessary for any facility or occupation that wishes to remain relevant. As McKenzie writes:

Those [...] librarians who hold stubbornly to a 1950s definition of the job



are likely to pass and be forgotten—extinct before their time. While many of the tasks that were important back then remain important in this decade, new challenges must be firmly placed at the core of any survival strategies. By embracing these new challenges, [...] libraries can make themselves indispensable. (McKenzie)

The same goes for citizens; as long as people continue to believe that libraries boast nothing more than an antiquated system that they have no use for, these individuals will miss out on all that the modern libraries have to offer. Even though both the buildings themselves and the people who work within them continue to be underestimated by library detractors, these repositories of knowledge are discovering new ways to overcome that each year.

### **The Future**

In hopes of holding readers and patrons' interest, libraries have made several changes over the recent years, the most notable of which concern technological advancements. Jobs for librarians have come to include positions such as experts in digital repositories, metadata and websites in order to meet customers' demand for online accessibility. Michael Schofield, the Librarian of Web Services at the Alvin Sherman Library, Research, and Information Technology Center at Nova University in Florida, is responsible for many of the technological components that are developed at his workplace. "I generally oversee the direction of all web projects, maintain our web presence, and facilitate reference, distance, and instruction libraries with all online materials and databases," Schofield said (Schofield). Even though his career is a relatively new occupation, he is certain that it will remain necessary for as long as people still wish to

access library resources from home or visit the library and have access to various forms of technology. Schofield says:

There is no part of the modern library that is not wound-up in the web. Collecting, processing, accessing, and finding materials all rely, at the very least, on a robust Intranet. Accessing and staying informed about the library requires technical literacy. My point is that for a library to be anything but haunted, cobwebbed, and abandoned, it needs to jump on board. The future relevancy and life of libraries in large part rely on their technical components and resources. (Schofield)

In addition to seeking the means to physically meet the technological demands of the public through computer acquisition and adequate bandwidth, libraries are also introducing new workers who specialize in technology and can meet the needs of both technologically savvy and technologically challenged individuals. For librarians who themselves are not technologically inclined, adapting to this change in the public's priorities can be difficult, but that doesn't mean that they are not willing to try. Aedin Clements has worked at libraries in Ireland, Gambia, New Jersey, and Michigan, including at Western Michigan University, and has witnessed the changing face of libraries throughout her career. Clements said:

About twelve years ago, a sister-in-law said to me, 'With all this online information, won't you become redundant?' At the time, I answered, 'I think my skills will be used in a different way, helping people find their way through all this information, and also, people will be more aware that the information they

need is available, and their requirements will increase.’ I believe I was correct, and last year that same sister-in-law was visiting and she complained that her graduate students didn’t know how to do research. I recommended that she get to know the school’s librarians and arrange for her students to have some meetings with them. I described that this is what I do for students and she was amazed, as she didn’t know that we did this. (Clements)

David Isaacson, who was the General Reference Librarian and the Head Reference and Humanities Librarian at Western Michigan University before retiring in 2006, is in agreement with Clements. He originally had negative feelings regarding the growing presence of technology in libraries, saying, “The electronic world sometimes causes people to be ironically less connected in meaningful ways. Often in libraries, the computers dominate everything else. Users check their e-mail or play games on the web rather than using the computers for research. It’s sometimes a losing battle” (Isaacson). However, Isaacson admits that there are also several aspects of librarianship that have been enhanced and improved by the addition of technological devices. “The wired classroom re-energized me. It was so much easier to teach from a teacher’s terminal where I could control the computers in the classroom that were being used by the students, who came in for an hour or two for a library instruction session related to a specific class assignment,” he said (Isaacson).

The eBook craze that has swept the nation with the creation of Nooks and Kindles has also introduced a new literature format that librarians must consider when building their collections. According to the ALA, “The proportion of U.S. libraries that made eBooks available

almost doubled over the past five years, climbing from 38.3 percent in 2007 to 67.2 percent in 2011” (“State of America’s Libraries). While some publishing companies have refused to sell eBooks to libraries, including Macmillan, Hachette Book Group, Penguin, and Simon & Schuster, many others, such as Random House, have been more than willing to discuss the availability and pricing of eBooks to libraries (“State of America’s Libraries”). “Though eBook demand is growing rapidly, print books still comprise a significant portion of acquisitions in public libraries. Libraries would see more setbacks in their ability to provide no-fee access to eBooks before improvements in the market, however,” said the ALA. Despite the difficulties of negotiating with publishers and acquiring a large amount of the eBooks that are available to buyers, providing a wide variety of eBooks to patrons remains a goal for the majority of public libraries and they continue to work towards achieving that ambition.

Anyone who has visited a library recently may have noticed a change in atmosphere compared to the libraries of the past. The days of a strict librarian peering at you over her glasses and scolding you with a strong “Shh!” are over. Libraries have adopted a more casual vibe to create a community space where people can come together and enjoy reading in the company of others. “Today’s libraries are reinventing themselves as vibrant town squares,” said Karen Ann Cullotta of *The New York Times* (Cullotta). It is not uncommon to see play areas for children, couches and comfy chairs, and, especially in libraries on college campuses, people enjoying food while they peruse their books. As Clements said, “When I went to the library as a child, I went to borrow books and nothing more. Nowadays, people take their children to the library to play, read books, participate in various library programs, and also to borrow books.

But I see public libraries more heavily used now than when I was a child” (Clements). Other libraries have begun to model themselves after bookstores in attempt to ensure that they are carrying the items that the public desires. For example, in Arlington Heights, Illinois, requests to place a title on hold by three people prompt a computer tracking system to automatically order another copy of the text. While this ensures that the library will always have the books that patrons want to read on their shelves, “[...] it has had some unintended consequences, too: the library’s shelves are now stocked with 36 copies of *Shades of Grey*” (Cullotta). As libraries adapt to meet the needs of a new generation with different expectations, they are bound to be met with challenges. Whether they are attempting to provide patrons with improved eBook selections or trying to aesthetically appeal to customers, there are undoubtedly bugs that will need to be worked out of the system. However, the important thing to take note of is simply that libraries are continuing to evolve and create spaces that the public will look forward to visiting and enjoy.

Thousands of years ago, the main focus of libraries was, understandably, the books. Oftentimes, people had to be of a certain status to gain entry to the building, great lengths were taken to obtain books, and visitors certainly couldn’t take the writings home with them. Libraries still place a great deal of importance upon the books that they place on their shelves, but as the years have passed, the people that they serve have become equally important. Libraries strive to meet the public’s every need, even when doing so poses challenges or require serious adjustments. Statistics have shown that citizens are responding positively to these changes, for the number of visitors, book rentals, and Internet users have all continued to rise

despite budget cuts and technological advancements that cause some to say that the modern library is becoming obsolete and redundant. However, libraries remain repositories of knowledge, playing a key role in the development of children and providing people of all ages with the opportunity to learn something new. Many people believe that the only thing that can be obtained from the library is books that they can find for themselves online, but they are overlooking several qualities that make libraries places that people have continued to flock to for thousands of years. They are a space for families to enjoy each other's company, a place where people know that they can find the most reliable information (as well as trained professionals who can help them search for it), and somewhere to turn to if one wants human interaction when obtaining information rather than just a search engine. Libraries are one of the oldest facets of civilization and the American public can't turn its back on them now.

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