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### The Essence of the Library at a Public Research University as Seen Through Key Constituents' Lived Experiences

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**THE ESSENCE OF THE LIBRARY AT A PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AS  
SEEN THROUGH KEY CONSTITUENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES**

by

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B.S. August 1997, University of North Texas  
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

HIGHER EDUCATION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
December 2016

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**ABSTRACT****THE ESSENCE OF THE LIBRARY AT A PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AS  
SEEN THROUGH KEY CONSTITUENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES**

George J. Fowler  
Old Dominion University, 2016  
Director: Dr. Dennis E. Gregory

“The library is the heart of the university” is an oft-repeated metaphor used to describe the role or centrality of the library. The implication is that the library is central to the university’s teaching, research, and service mission. This concept, though previously generally accepted without authoritative proof, is facing numerous challenges to its validity. There has been considerable research and talk about how to make the library central, again. Much has been focused on what to do, rather than why.

As John Budd stated in 1995, “grounded study of the use of libraries, say, or of the transmission of information is impossible without an understanding of what underlies the act of using a library or of transmitting information... without an understanding of the ontological purpose of the library—its essence or being—the empirical study of its function as an organization lacks a fundamental context. By ontology of the library I mean the core of the library's being, the reason for the library's existence” (pp. 305-306).

Through this transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher is proposing an ontological purpose of the library at a public research university from the perspectives of representatives of its nine key constituencies—chief executive officer, chief academic officer, chief research officer, chief student affairs officer, library director, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

This dissertation is dedicated to:

Sophia Fowler, my wife of 23 years. You have always encouraged me to pursue my passions, and have enabled me to do so. I Love You!

June Czyz, my Mother-in-Law. Thank you for suggesting my career path when no one, including myself, knew where my passions would be. Though you have passed, you are still with me in spirit, and, with every accomplishment, Sophia and I wonder what you would think and say.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who have supported me throughout my doctoral program—too many to list. Pursuing a Ph.D. is a significant undertaking, made even more so by working full time. Thank you to all of my colleagues in the University Libraries, at Old Dominion University, and everywhere else.

To my family back in Wisconsin, who have accepted my non-existence for the last 4.5 years. I'm back!

Thank you, Dr. Gregory. You have been there for me from my initial interest in the degree program through my final effort. You have provided the guidance, support, and room to learn that I have needed in order to survive and succeed. Thank you, too, to Dr. Scribner and Dr. Esqueda, who helped guide me through the dissertation process.

Finally, I am humbled by the passion and willingness of those who participated in this study. Many of you have extremely full schedules, and not just the resource allocators, and that you made the time to participate, will not be forgotten.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

“The library is the heart of the university” is an oft-repeated metaphor, though mostly repeated by librarians. It was used at least as early as 1924 in an American Library Association Bulletin (Leupp, 1924). What that metaphor implies, however, is open to debate. Is it the primary organ of the university? Is it the central (literal and figurative) unit on campus? Is it because information is the lifeblood of the university and the library is the pump that circulates it throughout all parts of it? Is the heart the locus of power? Is it the symbol that embodies the ultimate purpose of the university? Is it something else – simply a promotional slogan to build support for the library? We may never know what was intended by the people who first established the metaphor, but that has not stopped researchers, experts, and the lay public, from presuming what was intended and making decisions or recommendations based on that presumption.

Libraries are service organizations, serving the many various information needs of their constituencies. Once the seeming epitome of consistency and stability, they are now the focus of considerable efforts to evaluate and redefine their roles in modern research universities (Cuillier, 2012; Lankes, 2011; Stoffle & Cuillier, 2011). As Fremont Rider asked in his seminal book *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library*, “we may repeat that the library is ‘the heart of the college,’ but are we acutely anxious that our assent shall be more than lip service?” (1944, p. xv). With the continual change in the information environment and higher education, especially the expectation for accountability, the role of the library has been questioned more than it has in the past (Cuillier, 2012; Franklin, 2012). The increased questioning of the metaphor does not

indicate that the library is not central. What it does indicate is if the library is central to the university, it has to prove it.

If one accepts that the library's mission is to further the mission of the institution (Oakleaf, 2010, p. 12), then the important next step is to determine how. What is not debatable is that research has indicated that the "library is the heart of the university" does not enjoy widespread support or agreement (Association of Research Libraries, 2013; Grimes, 1998; Lynch, Murray-Rust, & Parker, 2007). Though the library may not be the *heart*, it is still an overwhelmingly popular unit, even if the popularity does not equate to resources, use, or priority (Fister, 2010).

For much of the history of public research universities, some of which were founded with the establishment of a library (Atkins, 1991), the trajectories of the institutions and their libraries were similar. If one uses budget as a measure of alignment (Ashar & Shapiro, 1988; Grimes, 1998; Hackman, 1985; Lachman, 1989), then it was not until World War II that those trajectories diverged, with the divergence appearing to widen, as reflected by funding of the library as a percentage of the overall university budget. According to the Association of Research Libraries (2013), the average university expenditure on the library as a percentage of the total university expenditure has declined from a recent high of 3.7% in 1984 to a continually declining low of 1.8% in 2011. As with the "library is the heart of the university" metaphor, no single researcher has identified the cause of this decline, but it has been a popular source for recommendations on how to "fix" it and return the library to its proper, prominent place at the public research university. In other words, to make it central.

People have been discussing, proposing, studying, and implementing roles for libraries at research universities since there have been research universities (Atkins, 1991). As research



universities have evolved and changed, so have their libraries. As part of this co-evolution, the role of the library and its importance to the university have diverged in theory, perspective, and practice. Grimes (1998) and Lynch et al. (2007) studied this phenomenon and their research is instrumental in framing this study.

In 1993, Grimes conducted a qualitative study of seven academic institutions using grounded theory, within which she investigated the truth of the metaphor “the library is the heart of the university.” Her research involved interviews with the Chief Academic Officer and Chief Executive Officer at each of those institutions, with the “goal to identify empirical indicators to link the concept of academic library centrality with actual library experience” (Grimes, 1998, p. 68). In the end, her research indicated little evidence to support the traditional metaphor.

In 2004, Lynch et al. (2007) conducted a follow-up study to Grimes’s 1993 research. They used the same research questions to interview people in the same positions at six universities. As with Grimes’ study, the findings indicated that “heart of the university” was no longer applicable. They suggested something that “describes the library’s measurable value to the institution, such as immediacy and substitutability” (Lynch et al., 2007, p. 225). “To secure support, the library must now demonstrate how it serves the university mission” (Lynch et al., 2007, p. 225).

It is apparent from the fact that all research universities still have libraries, that libraries still play a role in supporting their universities’ missions. It is equally as obvious from the funding trend, that this role is perceived to be less central. In contrast to the premise that Grimes (1998) and Lynch Lynch et al. (2007) posit, being central is not the goal. The goal is for the library to serve its purpose, receive sufficient resources, and contribute to the mission of the university. In order to do that, however, it is important to determine how the library is different

from other units (Ecker, 1979; Weick, 1976). Though many studies have defined this uniqueness through current activities and philosophies, they have all been based on the same presupposition: that a library exists to connect a user with the information he or she needs (Bell, Dempsey, & Fister, 2015; Delaney & Bates, 2015; Feret & Marcinek, 1999; Lougee, 2009; Neal, 2009; Virgil, 2013; Z. Wang, 2013; Wegner & Zemsky, 2007). What if that is not the real purpose, but just a way to serve the library's purpose? If this is not the real purpose, then what is?

Stated differently, what is the *essence* of the library at a public research university? Using the transcendental phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, Moustakas (1994), defined the essence as "that which is common or universal. The condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p.100). If the essence of the library is known, then it would follow that identifying which actions to take could proceed based on this new information. This essence may be exactly what some experts say it is, but which experts? Or, it may be something no one expects, which could cause significant ripples throughout the public research university library community.

It is important to note that deriving an essence is not a single-shot, eternal description. Essence, when derived through qualitative phenomenological research methods, describes the essence for a particular time and space. Husserl (2012) explained Essence as,

On grounds of principle the spatial shape of the physical thing can be given only in some single perspective aspect; also that apart from this inadequacy which clings to the unfolding of any series of continuously connected intuitions and persists in spite of all that is thereby acquired, every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations; and so on, *in infinitum* (p.12).

Or, as Moustakas (1994) states,

The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon (p.100).

Determining the essence through phenomenology requires examining the “lived experiences” of people with the phenomenon, which, in this case, is the library at a public research university. The question then becomes, whose lived experiences?

Building on the presuppositions that the library is a service organization and its mission is to serve the mission of the university (Lynch et al., 2007; Oakleaf, 2010), then the purpose of the library should be based on the expectations of the library’s key constituencies who depend on the library to fulfill its purpose. Cullen and Calvert (1995) identified six constituencies: resource allocators, senior library staff, other library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Wand (2011) identified three categories of constituents—library (library employees), internal (students, faculty, university offices, and external (IT industry, publishers and vendors, other libraries, archives and consortia, and independent scholars and researchers) (p.244). Further, other researchers (Briggs, 2012; Datig, 2014; Estabrook, 2007; Grimes, 1998; Hughes, 1992; Kracker & Pollio, 2003; Lynch et al., 2007; Robertson, 2015) selected particular constituencies to study. Comparing these selected constituency surveys, the most common, key constituencies appear to be resource allocators, direct or internal users, and library personnel; specifically, the chief executive officer, chief academic officer, chief research officer, chief student affairs officer, library director, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

This research attempted to describe the essence of the library at three public research universities in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States through the lived experiences of members of these nine constituencies. These lived experiences provide a temporal view into the essence of the library at a public research university as a contribution to the conceptual and operational discussions occurring in and around these libraries.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the library at a public research university from the library's key constituencies' lived experiences. This was done within a transcendental phenomenological structure and through the researcher's Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation, to develop a composite textural and structural description of the library at this time, in these institutions, and with these research participants. The study also explored whether there were differences among different constituency groups or among the institutions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a public research university?
2. How does this essence align with current practice and theory?
3. What implications do these findings have on research universities and their libraries?

### **Significance of the Study**

Much ado about the relevance of the library has been made by a number of public research university library constituencies, both internal to the university and external, such as funders, local communities, and the media, about the relevance of the library. Is there a future for the library?

There is a basic presupposition that libraries are as they should be. But what if this basic presupposition is wrong? This study will contribute to the professional literature on the purpose of the library by returning to the public research university library “just as [it is] given” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Through the inclusion of all key constituencies, as defined by Cullen and Calvert (1995), namely: resource allocators, library director, library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students at three comparable public research universities, and by establishing the trustworthiness of the researcher, the findings can be incorporated in discussions on future directions of these libraries.

### **Overview of Method**

A qualitative, transcendental phenomenological method was selected for this research. This method, developed by Moustakas (1994), enables the exploration of a phenomenon free from “prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p.85), from what *experts* have said, and from the researcher’s experience and learning. However, as part of the Human Sciences, it requires the researcher to intuit the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Data Collection**

Three public research universities in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States were selected based on the willingness of the library director to facilitate the data collection. Initially, the sample was stratified into the nine constituencies, with five constituencies being narrowed to an individual person. For the remaining four constituencies, a convenience sample was used. The researcher conducted 30-minute individual phone interviews with the chief executive officer, chief administrative officer, chief research officer, and chief student affairs officer, 60-minute individual phone interviews with the library director, and 60- to 90-minute, individual, in-person focus groups with library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students at each

institution. In total, there were 83 participants, to include representatives from each of the 27 samples. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups, seeking full descriptions of the participants' experiences with the library. Each session was recorded for later transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher followed the eight-step process developed by Moustakas (1994, pp. 120-121), which involved the overall processes of Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Through an iterative process of Epoche and member-checking, the researcher horizontalized the individual transcripts; developed individual textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions; and finally derived a composite textural-structural description of the essence of the library at a public research university.

### **Trustworthiness**

The researcher applied the techniques of triangulation of sources and researchers, member checking, reflexive journaling, and an audit to establish the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Erlandson, 1993).

### **Delimitations**

The researcher limited the scope of the research to three research universities within the same region of the United States. The researcher also limited the number of focus groups at each institution for each constituency to one focus group per constituency. There are many additional constituencies that were not included in the study, such as university staff, trustees, local community, and funders.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Centrality

Centrality is “how closely the purposes of a unit match the central mission of its institution” (Hackman, 1985, p. 61).

### Constituencies

For the purpose of this work, constituencies are defined based on the multiple-constituencies model of organizational effectiveness as those directly and indirectly associated with an organization “who may form evaluations of its activities, and may be able to influence the activities of that organization to some extent” (Connolly, Conlon, & Deutsch, 1980, p. 213). Cullen and Calvert (1995) identified six constituencies for academic libraries: resource allocators, senior library staff, other library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

#### **resource allocators.**

Resource allocators are “key decision makers in the university management, such as the president and vice-presidents” (Cullen & Calvert, 1995, p. 440).

#### **senior library staff.**

Senior library staff are those “engaged in policy and decision making” (Cullen & Calvert, 1995, p. 440). For this research, this was restricted to the library director.

#### **other library staff.**

Other library staff are individuals working in the library who are not the library director, to include associate directors through part-time classified staff.

**faculty.**

Faculty are individuals who are employed by the university to teach and conduct research. This group includes tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure-track, and adjuncts.

**graduate students.**

Graduate students are those students who have earned a bachelors' degree and are pursuing further education at the masters, doctoral, post-doctoral, or professional levels.

**undergraduate students.**

Undergraduate students are those students who have not yet earned a bachelors' degree and may be working towards an associates or bachelors, or taking classes at the same level as those who are.

**Public Research University**

For the purpose of this study, a public research university is defined by the Carnegie classification as that of doctorate-granting universities with either high or very-high research activity.

**Summary and Dissertation Outline**

The role of the library at a public research university has been widely discussed, posited, and researched. However, this researcher has not found a comprehensive study of the essence of the library on which to base the other studies. Further, no studies have included all constituencies' perspectives at multiple, similar institutions. Additional research is needed to contribute to the body of knowledge and to help clarify the purpose of a library at a public research university.

The remainder of the dissertation is organized in four chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature and establishes this study firmly within the broader context. Chapter 3



discusses the research design and methods. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the results, implications, and suggest areas for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Who am I? Why am I here? These are questions that individuals ask themselves when dealing with existential crises. They are also questions that are asked about organizations when faced with similar situations. The answers to these questions are critical to the success of an organization. Furthermore, these questions can and should be asked on a continual basis if the people in the organization want it to continue to be successful (Chakravarthy, 1982). People within an organization can look internally for the answers, but it would behoove those in a non-profit, public, service organization, who work to meet a need, to ask those whom they serve.

The specific non-profit, public, service organization that is the focus of this study is the library at the public research university in the United States. Few, if any, units in a university have been as centrally regarded as the library, with some institutions in the Colonial Era being founded with the only building being a library (Hamlin, 1981). It was likely either Christopher Langdell, then Dean of the Harvard Law School, or Charles Eliot, then President of Harvard College around 1873, who initially said that the [law] library was the heart of the law school (Danner, 2015). Architecturally speaking, “the library is the heart of a university, and should be so placed as to be in closest connection with each department” (Stanley, 1889). In the 1891 Annual Meeting of the University of North Carolina, it was recorded that “the library is the heart of the university” (Board of Trustees). Then, according to B. B. Moran (1984), by the early twentieth century, this phrase “came into vogue to describe the integral role libraries played in higher education” (p. 1). However, by 1944, when Freemont Rider wrote, “we may repeat that the library is ‘the heart of the college,’ but are we acutely anxious that our assent shall be more

than lip service?” (p. xv), this metaphor was already being questioned. The questioning continues.

As Richard De Gennaro told his faculty at Harvard College Library, “Libraries are at a turning point. They are facing severe fiscal limits, increasing demands, and unprecedented technological change. They must reinvent and reposition themselves for the information age and the next century or gradually lose their relevance” (De Gennaro, 1991, p. 1). Although this quote is more than 20 years old, its message is just as true now, as evidenced by the reduction in percentage of funding of the library by their institution over the past 30 years. According to the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) study of 40 U.S. institutions since 1982, average funding for the library as a percentage of the total university expenditure has decreased from 3.7% in 1984 to 1.8% in 2011 (Association of Research Libraries, 2013).

The questions that remained unanswered from De Gennaro’s statement are “how do libraries reinvent and reposition themselves?” What should be the new role of the library? Who should determine that role? Stepping back one step further, should the library still have a role? Alternatively, are libraries becoming irrelevant—their traditional roles becoming obsolete or being performed by other units on campus? Fortunately for libraries, studies have shown that faculty, administrators, and students still consider libraries to have important roles to play on campus (Cullen & Calvert, 1995; Estabrook, 2007; Fister, 2010; Robertson, 2015).

Conceptually, defining the role of the library at a public research university is important to the university in order to know how much the library should be resourced in comparison with other units on campus (Grimes, 1998). The argument is that units more central, or vital, to the university’s mission should receive more resources. Thus, if the library’s role is central to the university’s mission, it should be resourced accordingly.

The way a library supports the university's mission is different from the way campus Information Technology, an academic department, advising, or any other unit on campus does. It is apparent from the fact that all research universities still have libraries, that the library plays a role, but it is equally as obvious from the funding trend, that this role is perceived to be less central. In contrast to the premise that Grimes and Lynch et al., posit, being central is not the goal. The goal is for the library to serve its purpose, receive sufficient resources, and contribute to the mission of the university. In order to do that, however, it is important to determine how the library is unique from the other units (Ecker, 1979; Weick, 1976). Though many studies have defined this uniqueness through current activities and philosophies, they have all been based on the same presupposition – that a library exists to connect a user with the information he or she needs. What if that is not the real purpose, but just a way to serve the library's true purpose? If this is not the real purpose, then what is?

Centrality, as based on organizational theory depicted by Huff (1991) and Lachman (1989), is related to the amount of interaction or interdependence of a subunit with other subunits of an organization. More interaction equals more centrality. Another aspect of centrality is how closely the unit aligns with, and supports, the university's mission. Centrality translates to resource support, involvement in decision-making, and significance within the organization. It is undetermined whether being a central unit creates those opportunities or whether having those characteristics makes a unit central.

Both Grimes (1998) and Lynch et al. (2007) found that the library is not symbolically or practically central to the university. Robertson (2015), however, found that the Canadian provosts in his study thought the library was central. Even if one takes a traditional or historical view of the library as central to a university, it is important to develop an understanding of the

contemporary library's role within the institution. Therefore, the question to address is, "what role?" In order to know what role, one must first know the purpose, or meaning, of the library. And for that, according to Oakleaf (2010), one must know the purpose of the library's parent institution – in this case, the public research university.

### **Role of the Public Research University**

Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) come in many shapes, sizes, orientations, and purposes. From community colleges to research universities, from non-profit to for-profit, from public to private, and any combination and permutation of these options, the variety of higher education institutions contributes to the variety of expectations (Duderstadt, 2012). Some view the role to be job preparation or advancement, while others view it as developing an informed citizenry, while still others view it as a place where new knowledge is created (Roger, 2009). Let us begin by defining the public research university and then determining its purpose and roles.

The National Science Board (2012) defines a public research university as "research intensive, doctorate-granting institutions that receive a share of funding from state and local appropriations and serve as a critical component of the overall higher education landscape" (p.2). Of the approximately 4,600 IHEs in the United States, there are 177 public research universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014-15). In 2013, there were approximately four million students enrolled, of which, 87 percent of entering freshmen were from the top half of their graduating class (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2015, pp. 1-2). The National Science Board (2012) lists education and training—particularly for scientists and engineers—academic R&D and innovation, and the public mission as the three primary responsibilities of the public research university.

The modern American public research university began forming in the late 1800's, when research and education were combined to make research the focus of education and to engage the students in the research (Robbins, 2008). "A research university is not only an institution, but also an idea," which includes an emphasis on "service to society as a key value" (Altbach & Salmi, 2011, p. 15). Altbach and Salmi (2011) listed several key differentiators of public research universities, which, collectively, are the mission of public research universities:

- Commitment to disinterested research—knowledge for its own sake—as well as to the more practical elements of research and its use in contemporary society
- The best and brightest students, who are committed to the institution's ethos
- Allowing "time for reflection and critique and for a consideration of culture, religion, society, and values. The spirit of the research university is open to ideas and willing to challenge established orthodoxies."
- Firm link to society
- Academic freedom and open inquiry (p.16).

Perkins (1966) indicated the role of a public research university was to advance knowledge through acquisition, transmittal, and application, which is often translated as research, teaching, and service.

As funding from public sources decreases and demands increase (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2015; Cuillier & Stoffle, 2011; Duderstadt, 2012; National Science Board, 2012; Robbins, 2008; Roger, 2009), institutions have had to identify other sources of funding, which may contribute to role diffusion and confusion. As institutions continue to exist, their costs continue to grow with inflationary costs of equipment and resources that usually outpace the national inflation rate (Regazzi, 2012). It is within this public research

university environment that the library is expected to contribute to the parent institution's mission. In the current era of accountability, it is critical for the public research university's administration to understand the purpose and roles of the library, as with all other units, and to know how to evaluate and resource it.

### **Role of the Library**

Within a public research university there are many disparate parts that, according to Weick (1976) and Ecker (1979), make the university function as a "loosely coupled" organization or system, with each part contributing to the university's mission in a way unique and appropriate to that part. The role of university administration, faculty, students, funding and accrediting agencies, student services, and academic support services such as the library varies at each institution, though all components are expected to cooperate towards achieving the mission of the institution. With the aforementioned variety of expectations regarding the role of a public research university in the United States, it should be no surprise that one of those loosely coupled cogs within the university, such as the library, also lacks a clarity of purpose.

Over time, few discrete areas of the institution have been as integrated or integral to mission accomplishment as the library, which has been described by some as "the heart of the university" (Grimes, 1998). In fact, some universities were established by creating a library. For example, the first physical objects owned by a higher education institution in the United States were books donated to found Harvard in 1636 (Hamlin, 1981, pp. 5-6) and Yale was founded in 1701 with several collections of books "for the founding of a College in this Colony" (Shores, 1966, p. 21). Libraries at early IHEs were absolutely central to the institution, sometimes being the only building on campus (Hamlin, 1981). As campuses grew, the library was able to remain central to the institutions by acquiring, preserving, and providing access to the information

resources. Information resources were critical to both faculty and students, and therefore kept the library interdependent with academics (Hamlin, 1981).

The library may not be the “heart of the university,” but it is still an integral component of all research universities, supporting teaching and research. It supports all colleges, to include faculty, students, and staff (Lougee, 2009). The library impacts the effectiveness of the rest of the university, even though the specific responsibilities may differ (Duderstadt, 2009, pp. 218-220).

At its core, a library in a public research university exists to enable the university to serve its mission (Oakleaf, 2010, p. 12), though the difficulty is in identifying how. Therefore, if the public research university advances knowledge through acquisition, transmittal, and application, the library enables its success by storing, preserving, and providing access to that knowledge (Kenney, 2009, p. 481). At least, that is the traditional view (Jakubs, 2008). The question is whether that view is still relevant, which several studies and anecdotes suggest that it is not (Cuillier, 2012; Hughes, 1992; Jakubs, 2008; Kenney, 2009; Lougee, 2009; Lynch et al., 2007).

Adding to the uncertain role of the library, its traditional roles appear to be co-opted by other entities, some commercial like Google and Amazon, and others non-profit like JSTOR and arXive (Lougee, 2009). The advent of the Internet and increase in non-academic interests on campuses have relegated the library to a less central standing, though the library is still sometimes referred to as “the heart of the university”. Further, with the emergence of information technology as a distinct and significant unit on campus, usually separate from the library, much of what had been the purview of the library is now outside of it. Another significant change is the transition to electronic versions of books, journals, and other information resources. For those resources that are not free, the library still has to provide the



traditional services of acquiring and providing access, but technology has enabled the access to be sufficiently seamless to make the library's role in providing access to these resources practically invisible.

As Grimes (1998) described, the use of the metaphor of the library as “the heart of the university” has been so indiscriminant as to render its definition impossible and its use relatively meaningless (pp. 1-18). Focusing on the library as a central unit, Grimes (1998), and subsequently, Lynch et al. (2007), indicated the library is no longer considered as central to the university.

This centrality, as the Grimes (1998) and Lynch et al. (2007) studies indicated, has eroded to a point where libraries are no longer protected and need to justify their budgets along with the rest of campus (Regazzi, 2012). Campus administrators, regardless of their personal feelings, are not supporting the library at the same proportional levels as they once did, as indicated by the library's funding as a percentage of the university budget continuing to decline (Cuillier & Stoffle, 2011, pp. 777-778).

With this research in hand, the task is to define the library's place at the university. The researcher considers place to be comprised of two components—role and purpose. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) lists two relevant definitions of ‘role’— “the function performed by someone or something in a particular situation or process”; and “a person's allotted share, part, or duty in life and society; the character, place, or status assigned to or assumed by a person” (Role). The OED also lists two relevant definitions of ‘purpose’— “the reason for which something is done or made, or for which it exists; the result or effect intended or sought; the end to which an object or action is directed; aim”; and “that which a person sets out to do or attain; an object in view; a determined intention or aim” (Purpose). The purpose drives the role, and

therefore must precede it. Extensive research has been done, using a broad spectrum of methodologies, to determine what roles the library should perform. This research has held the same presupposition—that the purpose of the library was to store, preserve, and provide access to knowledge (Kenney, 2009, p. 481). No research has been conducted to determine whether that presupposition is valid.

### **Role-Determining Methods**

Walter and Neal (2014) describe several recent events that brought together thought-leaders to identify roles for the academic library. In May 2014, the American Library Association (ALA) held a two-day summit that included 80 participants from libraries and library organizations, and addressed the roles, values, and future of libraries, with considerable discussion but no definitive answers. The intent of this summit was to inform the creation of the Center for the Future of Libraries, ALA's leading effort to enable libraries to anticipate, prepare for, and lead in the future. (Walter & Neal, 2014)

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL), through its Strategic Thinking and Design Process (2014), developed a vision for the research library in 2033: "In 2033, the research library will have shifted from its role as a knowledge service provider within the university to become a collaborative partner within a rich and diverse learning and research ecosystem" (p. 6).

Others have attempted to identify the roles of the library, sometimes couched in the terms of determining the value of the library. While the means of identifying the role have varied, several methods have been the most common: scenarios, literature reviews, case studies, experts' projections, user experience and ethnography, and constituency surveys. The next section will provide examples of these methods.

## **Scenarios**

A recent movement within academic libraries has been the use of scenario planning. One set of scenarios was developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (Staley & Malenfant, 2010). The ARL developed the most common scenario set in 2010 as a tool for its member libraries to use to develop a long-range vision. ARL members organized a workshop of 30 library experts to develop four scenarios based on current trends affecting research libraries set in the year 2030. This tool provides the opportunity for a library to develop a fuller understanding of its potential future environment and what roles it can play in those potential futures. The strategic focus for the ARL Scenarios was “how do we transform our organization(s) to create differential value for future users (individuals, institutions, and beyond), given the external dynamics redefining the research environment over the next 20 years” (Association of Research Libraries, 2010, p. 12).

Commonly, individual libraries use these and other scenarios generated for their level and type of library in order to determine the roles of their local library. Scenario planning is optimum if each scenario group includes representatives of all major constituency groups. This method is beneficial in that it considers the library within the broader university or research environments, but is based on the traditional purpose presupposition.

## **Literature reviews and environmental scans**

Delaney and Bates (2015) recently identified trends facing academic libraries through a review of recent, relevant literature. Others, such as the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee (2013, 2015), have expanded the literature review to include non-published works, environmental scans, and trends affecting higher education in addition to academic libraries. These reviews and scans have encompassed writings that cover each of the methods described in

this review along with other, less common approaches to the role of the library. There are also numerous reviews of position announcements and descriptions (Choi & Rasmussen, 2009; Triumph & Beile, 2015; H. Wang, Tang, & Knight, 2010), which provide a perspective into what other libraries are doing, but without a metric to indicate the appropriateness of these roles to the library's purpose.

### **Case studies**

Though not readily generalizable beyond the local institution, case studies are useful to highlight examples that can be further explored through research. Three such examples are: Lougee (2009), Stoffle and Cuillier (2011), and Neal (2011). Lougee reported on three case studies on future directions at the University of Minnesota, using what was being done at that university to indicate roles that libraries at other research universities could serve. Stoffle and Cuillier used the University of Arizona as another case to highlight emerging roles for research libraries. Lastly, Neal discusses the 2CUL project between the Cornell University and Columbia University libraries, through which they “integrate resources, collections, services, and expertise” (p. 73).

### **Expert opinions**

Polling of experts on the role of libraries is the most common method of informing, if not determining, the current and future role of research libraries. The American Library Association (ALA); Association of Research Libraries (ARL); Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL); Ithaka S+R; and, starting in 2014, New Media Consortium (NMC) have conducted research on the role of the library. They have polled broad segments of research library staff and directors, along with other interested parties, such as institutional decision makers (chief executive and administrative officers and library directors), library-affiliated organization leaders

(ARL, ACRL, etc.), and research library partners (publishers and presses, technologists, etc.). In addition to these organizations' polls, there are frequently panels of experts discussing the role of libraries at almost every library-related conference.

Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research and consulting service, has been surveying libraries and academics in both the US and the UK for over 10 years, and has remained consistent in much of the questioning in order to provide longitudinal perspectives to its results. The most recent survey of academic library directors (Long & Schonfeld, 2014) received responses from 499 library directors (33% response rate) from four-year colleges and universities. Of particular note in their findings, the authors indicated:

This cycle of the US Library Survey illustrates the pronounced differences in academic library leaders by institutional type. Views on collections, services, and organizational positioning differ notably across Carnegie classifications. While there are also many areas of broad commonality, this diversity appears to be a key and perhaps growing characteristic for this community. (p.5)

This observation of the differences in library directors' perspectives between Carnegie classifications coincides with the overall differences in responsibilities between institutions in those Carnegie classifications (Long & Schonfeld, 2014).

Additionally, Ithaka S+R has surveyed faculty in the US (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2013b) and the UK (Housewright, Schonfeld, & Wulfson, 2013a), and compiled a comparison between the two surveys (Schonfeld & Wulfson, 2013). In spite of the notable differences in education systems, the findings in the two surveys were relatively consistent and provide an overall faculty perspective on certain functions of the academic library. The UK survey included 3,498 responses (7.9% response rate); while the US survey included 5,261

responses (3.5% response rate) and the response rates among disciplines and Carnegie classifications/Research Libraries UK membership were representative of the overall populations. In spite of the low return rates for each survey, when compared with the survey population, the responses were well distributed across the demographic strata. When not representative, strata were weighted to compensate. One key finding in both of these surveys was that traditional uses of the library are declining in areas of paying for information resources and archiving resources.

ACRL, through the Value of Academic Libraries report Oakleaf (2010), has focused much of its research on “the articulation of library value to external audiences...[identifying]...how does the library advance the missions of the institution” (p.11). Oakleaf, with a research partner, performed a literature review and held conversations with librarians and library vendors to develop her recommendations. This report has become a core resource in academic libraries for determining the value a library provides to its institution. Areas of emphasis for this report were “student enrollment, student retention and graduation rates, student success, student achievement, student learning, student engagement, faculty research productivity, faculty teaching, service, and overarching institutional quality” (p.12). However, it does not provide any clear guidance regarding what the library should be doing besides showing that what the library does has value.

ACRL has polled experts on the changing roles of academic libraries (Wegner & Zemsky, 2007), and most recently in their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary publication “New Roles for the Road Ahead”, Steven Bell, Lorcan Dempsey, and Barbara Fister (2015), three well-respected experts on academic libraries, wrote a series of essays on future roles of academic libraries. None of the essays challenged the presupposed purpose of the library.

Two researchers in Poland, Blazej Feret and Marzena Marcinek conducted two Delphi studies, an original (1999) and a follow-up (2005) six years later to determine the “role of an academic library and what skills will an academic librarian need in the year 2005” (p. 2). The researchers surveyed first a population of 23 library professionals in 10 countries, then a population of 36 library professionals in 20 countries, with overlap of participants as possible. It is unknown how this population of experts was selected, which limits the reliability of the data gathered. The conclusions from their 2005 study, regarding the academic library in 2015 were:

- Most probably libraries will still exist in 2015 (it is worth pointing out, however, that opposite opinion was also expressed: libraries may be replaced altogether by a single net collection operated by government or other institution).
- Their prior[ity] activities will be information management and access, teaching, support for research and cooperation.
- At least 50% of users will visit the academic library once a year or more, not only to get information but also for social purposes
- Academic librarian as an information facilitator will be adding value to net-based resources
- Libraries will be distinctive and competitive thanks to their special and local collections, providing content in local languages.
- Libraries will become more study and social places than a place to find information. The true value of work done by librarians will be hidden behind the scenes” (Feret & Marcinek, 2005, p. 17).

## **User Experience and Ethnography**

The latest trend in academic library research is user experience (UX). It initially focused on designing the library's website from the user's perspective, but was expanded to include all aspect of the library. According to one of UX's strongest proponents, Steven Bell, "the current thinking in UX is to design for an environment that will instead make it possible for any user to derive satisfaction from his or her personal experience" (2014, p. 373). UX is primarily "about listening to and observing members of the academic community, studying their behaviors, asking them what matters to them, and adapting accordingly" (Bell, 2014, p. 381). In 2011, the Association of Research Libraries published a Spec Kit on User Experience. In it they state that UX is a relatively new to academic libraries and, therefore, lacks standardization (Fox & Doshi, 2011). Activities included within the UX process include assessment, user engagement, library design, outreach, and marketing, (Fox & Doshi, 2011) through methods such as ethnography, observations, interviews, and diaries, (Datig, 2015). The only robust research being conducted as part of UX is ethnography, which warrants further exploration.

Calhoun (2002) defines ethnography as, "the study of the culture and social organization of a particular group or community". It is a method often applied to understand the ways local users of the library interact with the library. Three projects highlight this growing trend in academic libraries.

### **Undergraduate Research Project.**

Starting in 2004, the Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester sought to answer the question, "what do students *really* do when they write their research papers?" (Foster & Gibbons, 2007). Ten years later, they conducted a refresher to see if anything had changed (Foster, 2013). With the help of an anthropologist, the researchers interviewed



faculty to identify what they expected of their students. The researchers then conducted student surveys, interviews, design workshops, and documentation including diaries, photos, maps, and drawings.

### **Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries (ERIAL).**

In 2008 and 2009, five Illinois IHEs—DePaul University, Illinois Wesleyan University, Northeastern Illinois University, University of Illinois at Chicago, and University of Illinois at Springfield—conducted an ethnographic study to address, “What do students actually do when they are assigned a research project for a class assignment and what are the expectations of students, faculty and librarians of each other with regard to these assignments?” (Asher, Duke, & Green, 2010). The researchers used ethnographic interviews, photo journals, student mapping diaries, web design workshops, research process interviews, cognitive maps, and retrospective research paper interviews of 693 students across the five institutions. One of the outputs of this project was a toolkit (Asher & Miller, 2011) that provides a framework for other academic libraries interested in conducting ethnographic or anthropologic studies at their institutions.

### **Project Information Literacy.**

Project Information Literacy “is grounded in information-seeking behavior research—how students conduct research and find information using which channels. Social science methods [were] used to study how college students conceptualize and operationalize course-related and everyday life research” (Head, 2013, pp. 373-374), and included focus groups, online surveys, interviews, and content analysis.

These three examples highlight how individual institutions can gain more insight into their local users, usually focusing on students. Though they touch on the users’ thoughts and

feelings, the researchers are interested in effective services and facilities, not in understanding the purpose of the library.

### **Constituency Survey**

The most directly applicable and actionable common method of identifying the role of the library is through surveying local constituencies. Since each institution is different, the constituency survey is not as generalizable as polling or scenario planning, although it can be made more generalizable by including more than one institution's constituencies. It is, however, the most effective method for determining what is expected of the specific research library (Oakleaf, 2010).

Researchers have conducted constituency surveys in a variety of ways. For example, Briggs (2012) surveyed 27 faculty and 236 students at one college to identify their needs and perceptions of the library using a four-point Likert-type scale. Hughes (1992) surveyed chief academic officers and library directors at 66 large institutions using a 9-point ranking system for topics relevant to those libraries to determine the relative value each position put on each of the topics. Datig (2014) conducted a mixed-methods survey and individual interview study of 42 international first-year students to identify what the students perceived to be the primary purposes of the library.

Robert F. Munn, then-acting provost at West Virginia University and a former librarian, wrote an article titled "The Bottomless Pit, or the Academic Library as Viewed from the Administration Building" (1968). In it Munn emphasized the importance of understanding university administrators' perspective, "for it is the Administration which establishes the salaries and official status of the director and his staff, which sets at least the total library budget, which decides if and when a new library building shall be constructed and at what cost. In short, it is

the Administration—not the faculty and still less the students—which determines the fate of the library and those who toil therein” (Munn, 1968, p. 51). In response to this article, and with funding from the Council on Library Resources, Larry Hardesty (1991) conducted a study of 39 chief academic officers at small liberal arts colleges. One key finding from Hardesty’s study was in response to Munn’s assertion that “The most accurate answer to the question, ‘what do academic administrators think about the library,’ is that they don’t think very much about it at all” (Munn, 1968, p. 52). Hardesty’s response was “Did the deans at these small liberal arts colleges think about the library? The answer was an emphatic Yes! Most spoke quite articulately about the role of the library in support of the institutional mission” (Hardesty, 1991, p. 220).

In her study, Grimes (1998) used a grounded theory method to interview the chief academic and chief executive officers at seven public, state-supported universities, to include two universities that were part of a pilot study. Grimes was interested particularly in the applicability of the “library is the heart of the university” metaphor and how central the library was to the mission of the university according to these key resource allocators. Most of the administrators thought little of the metaphor, though they all thought the library was central, through both its symbolic and practical roles. Further, the administrators considered both faculty and student opinions as important in evaluating the library. Grimes’ 1993 study identified 21 “indicators of academic library centrality”

1. Geographic uniqueness
2. Quality and expertise of personnel
3. Community or external financial support, including alumni support
4. Current reputation or prestige of the library
5. History of reputation or excellence of the library, including ARL ranking

6. Uniqueness of services offered (i.e., criticality and substitutability)
7. Number of people affected, including number of graduate students (i.e., use)
8. Symbolic role
9. Information storage and retrieval
10. Service attitude/responsiveness of library personnel
11. Faculty and student opinion
12. Quality or reputation of the university
13. Providing good information about the library to the CEOs/CAOs
14. Speed of responses and acquisition of information
15. Access to information and mechanisms for access, including current level of technology
16. Convenience to users
17. Size and quality of the library's collection, including periodicals
18. Specific services offered by the library
19. Practical role and use of the library
20. Quality of facilities provided by the library, including the provision of study space and a warm environment
21. University priorities (i.e., research priorities are linked to library collections and services; development and growth of disciplines; specific inclusion of library in plans to improve programs (p.101)

In summarizing the results, Grimes made two key points. First, "academic centrality is the promotion of user success" (1998, p. 115) and that, instead of being the "heart of the university," the library is a "crossroads community" (1998, p. 116). The community of users

utilize the library both as an enabler for making vital decisions and as a “main center of activity or assembly” (Grimes, 1998, p. 118). Moreover, like many crossroads, if the library does not provide what the community needs, the users will go elsewhere. The academic crossroads must have access, service, and tradition, including library services as critical components. Grimes (1998) states that “The academic library begins with collections, actual and virtual... [that are] enhanced when they provide users with collections that are easy to use and relevant to their needs” (p.122). Of critical note from Grime’s report, “The library that loses sight of its mission by focusing instead on the mode of “transportation” or technology, if it survives at all, will not remain an important contributor to the community and its needs” (p.120).

Lynch et al. (2007) replicated Grimes’ study by interviewing presidents and provosts at six universities in 2004 and comparing those results with Grime’s findings. The researchers identified several differences between the two studies, including the concept of centrality to the library, the importance of the symbolic role of the library, and how secure the library is in resource support on campus. The follow-up study found that the respondents considered the library as more central than did the original study’s participants— “In an emblematic sense, academic administrators still view the library as the heart of the university, a symbol of the intellectual purpose of the institution” (Lynch et al., 2007, p. 226). Further, while the symbolic role of the library was still seen as significant, the administrators suggested measurements such as immediacy and substitutability. Finally, Grimes’ findings indicated a general security of library funding, whereas Lynch et al. found that the library is no longer protected and has to compete for funding – either new or retaining current funding – with everyone else on campus. Lynch et al. (2007) make two recommendations for future effort., First, “the results of the study call into question the applicability of the centrality concept to libraries in universities and

indicate the need for research that offers a relevant model for use in those settings” (p..227).

And, second, instead of using the “library is the heart of the university” metaphor as an indication of value, the library “needs to determine what the university values, and how to speak about those things to make clear the contributions of the library toward enhancing or furthering these values” (p.225).

In 2007, Estabrook interviewed twenty-five chief academic officers at colleges and universities with the intent to identify what these administrators “want from their libraries” (p. 2). She found that they wanted the library to be used, have appropriate collections, a place with connections to everywhere on campus, and quality services. Though these provosts indicated an understanding of increased costs for collections, they still weighed the requirements to meet their expectations against all other needs. As she states, “even in institutions in which the library is seen as fully central and tied closely to the strategic plans of the institution, library funding is available for the needs not wants of the library staff” (p. 4).

Finally, Robertson (2015) interviewed nine provosts at Canadian research universities regarding the alignment of the library with the university mission, the future of the library, and indicators of success. All of the provosts indicated a strong relationship between the library’s role and the institutional mission. Additionally, all provosts foresaw increased importance of the libraries in the future, specifically as a place, in collections, and providing expertise. One area of difference among the provosts was in assessing the success of the library. Their answers included usage statistics, rankings, faculty and student feedback, and anecdotes of how the library contributes to the university’s strategic plan.

## Phenomenology

Perhaps the first person to propose the use of phenomenology for library science was John Budd. In 1995, he challenged the overwhelming prevalence of a positivistic epistemology in library science research, proposing phenomenology as being more appropriate, arguing “grounded study of the use of libraries, say, or of the transmission of information is impossible without an understanding of what underlies the act of using a library or of transmitting information... without an understanding of the ontological purpose of the library—its essence or being—the empirical study of its function as an organization lacks a fundamental context. By ontology of the library I mean the core of the library's being, the reason for the library's existence” (Budd, 1995, pp. 305-306). Though Budd proposed hermeneutic phenomenology, or the “art of reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9), the guiding philosophy and methodology is phenomenology – getting to “the things themselves”. Oddly, Budd reaffirms a presupposition of libraries by saying “at its core the library exists to collect, organize, and provide access to information” (1995, p. 306). The intention behind phenomenology is to remove all presuppositions, and arrive at the purpose through the research.

As Budd writes in a subsequent article, phenomenology is being more widely adopted and used as a foundation for research (Budd, 2005). Donovan (2012), in making one of his three arguments on “why the library is not the books”, states that “the emotional concomitants of libraries follow from their need to organize contents and the additional values libraries thereby capture and come to embody. Observers have written that libraries inspire deep emotional reactions from people. The phenomenology of libraries inspires a sizeable literature expressing authors’ relationships to the traditional book” (p.99).

One study bears emphasis. Jacqueline Kracker and Howard Pollio conducted a phenomenological study of undergraduate students at one university to identify how people “experience libraries” (Kracker & Pollio, 2003). Through the use of an open-ended written survey, which asked for three brief descriptions and detailed description, they gathered 708 separate incidents from 118 participants. The study was interested in all types of libraries, not just the one at the university, so most of the incidents applied to the other libraries. In developing the themes from the incidents, the researchers used the detailed incident from each participant. The major themes identified were Atmosphere, Size and Abundance, Organization/Rules and Their Effects on Me, and What I Do in the Library. As they indicate:

Size and abundance now become the most figural aspect of the library. The size of the facility and the quantity of information may initially overwhelm the student. The library is a place where she feels lost, confused, and intimidated. There are many floors and many special areas, but she may find comfort by claiming one area as her own, leaving others unexplored. Help is often needed, but it may or may not be available. She is aware that the library is a place of work and research to a greater extent, but it is still a place of relationship, a place to be with friends, and a place to meet new friends. The student has a heightened awareness of the atmosphere and is as conscious of the environment as when she was a young child: the physical surroundings, the ambiance, and the quiet or lack thereof. (p.1113-1114)

### **Summary**

This study addressed the fundamental concern of all studies and efforts to identify the role of the library as being based on unproven presuppositions. As Van Manen states, “scientific knowledge as well as everyday knowledge believes that it has already had much to say about a



phenomenon, such as what the phenomenon of [being a library at a public research university] is, or what [libraries] do or should do, before it has actually come to an understanding of what it means to be a [library at a public research university] in the first place” (1990, p. 47). This research provides the perspectives of a library’s constituencies through open-ended interviews to develop the meaning, or essence, of a library at a public research university.

Chapter 3 will address the research design for this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the library at a public research university from the library's key constituencies' lived experiences. What needs does the library meet? What emotions does the library elicit? Comprehensively, what does the library *mean* to its primary constituencies? Once that is resolved, identifying roles and actions can logically follow as means to accomplishing the purpose. If, however, we do not have a common understanding of the essence of the library, then practitioners in libraries and thereby their research universities, may be developing strategies and tactics that are misaligned with what the library means to its key constituencies. It is this underlying essence, the experience of library, that should be informing action. Therefore, through this study, the researcher attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a research university?
2. How does this essence align with current practice and theory?
3. What implications do these findings have on public research universities and their libraries?

This qualitative study was grounded in the social constructivist philosophy, which suggests that the meaning of a *thing* is constructed based on the individual meanings developed by a group of individuals. There is no single, right answer, but, instead, there is a composite description of the *thing* (Erlandson, 1993). The researcher selected this philosophy because of the researcher's experience and awareness of the complexities of the phenomenon being studied,

namely the library at a public research university. In order to fully describe *what* the library is, it is necessary to understand *what* it is from as wide a range of individuals as possible.

Chapter 3 will provide justification for the approach; a description of the methods used to conduct, analyze, and report on the results; and the benefit of the study.

### **Method**

In the selection of a research method, the researcher considered, first, whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods. Because “qualitative research is exploratory in nature” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 5), and the researcher was interested in exploring and describing the meaning of the library and not the measurement or relationship, the researcher chose a qualitative method. Through qualitative research, a researcher attempts to provide a context and develop an understanding of a phenomenon. This context and understanding forms the bases of theories, which can be applied to similar phenomena. Instead of focusing on counts or quantitative analyses to test a theory, the current complexity of the library at a public research university requires a further clarification before quantitative analysis can be effective to test the theories proposed.

Provided with the various qualitative research traditions available, Phenomenology was chosen for this research, because it assumes “Multiple realities exist and data thoroughly reflect participant perspectives and are contextually relevant” (Hays & Wood, 2011, p. 289). In particular, Moustakas’ Transcendental Phenomenology, which is based on Husserl, because it is “a science of pure possibilities carried out with systematic concreteness and that it precedes, and makes possible, the empirical sciences, the sciences of actualities” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). The participants’ perspectives of their “lived experiences” will build a new understanding of the essence of the library. Though guided by current literature and the researcher’s knowledge on the

subject, this research utilized Epoche to sequester the “general truths” and “prior explanations” already published and understood in order to develop a new basis of understanding the purpose, or essence, of the library at a public research university.

Conducting phenomenological research “is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 18). This description provides a meaning, significance, or essence of the phenomenon, which can lead to a more thorough understanding of it, in order to facilitate more thoughtful actions (Van Manen, 1990, p. 23). The description developed through this research is only one description of the phenomenon from these participants’ perspectives, through this research, at these places and time. There are an infinite number of additional descriptions available.

Each of the nine principles, processes, and methods of Transcendental Phenomenology, as summarized by Moustakas (1994), reinforced the appropriateness of this method over all others.

1. Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in nature and the natural world of everyday living.
2. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved.
3. Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgements, and understandings.

4. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations, or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, their phenomenal qualities and material properties. Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible.
5. Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced. In a phenomenological investigation, the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. The puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history essential dimensions of discovery, in the present and extensions into the future.
6. Subject and object are integrated—what I see is interwoven with how I see it, with whom I see it, and with whom I am. My perception, the thing I perceive, and the experience or act interrelate to make the objective subjective and the subjective objective.
7. At all points in an investigation, intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with my own sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means.
8. The data of experience, my own thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging are regarded as the primary evidences of scientific investigation.
9. The research question that is the focus of and guides an investigation must be carefully constructed, every word deliberately chosen and ordered in such a way that

the primary words appear immediately, capture my attention, and guide and direct me in the phenomenological process of seeing, reflecting, and knowing. (p.58-59)

### **Strategies for Trustworthiness**

In keeping with the phenomenology tradition, the researcher endeavored to establish the trustworthiness of the research through establishing the credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Erlandson, 1993). The specific techniques used were triangulation of sources and researchers, member checking, reflexive journaling, and an audit trail.

Credibility is the “compatibility of the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the inquiry’s respondents with those that are attributed to them” (Erlandson, 1993, p. 30). To establish credibility, the researcher triangulated the data sources through purposeful stratified and purposeful convenience sampling. In identifying the constituencies, the researcher stratified them into nine groups at three separate institutions, ensuring to have participation from each strata. Within the library personnel, faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate strata, the researcher used convenience sampling, as random sampling was impracticable. Triangulation of the research was achieved through the use of a research partner.

Additionally, the researcher used member checking to validate the transcriptions, individual textural-structural descriptions and themes, and the composite textural-structural description and themes. The researcher also maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process, in which he documented his thoughts, the processes, and other information relevant to the research.

Dependability is the likelihood that other researchers replicating the research would arrive at similar findings. Confirmability is the “degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (Erlandson, 1993, p. 34). Both of

these criteria were addressed through the researcher's use of a reflexive journal and development of an audit trail.

The researcher used a reflexive journal to document the process and his thoughts, so that subsequent researchers could align their processes accordingly. Further, the audit trail associated with this research included the informed consents, interview protocols, transcriptions, reflexive journal, member-checking correspondence with the participants, and the research partner's notes.

### **Role of Researcher**

Subjectivity and reflexivity are critical aspects to effective qualitative research, which is why the researcher used a research partner to address these components, as well as to minimize the effect of the researcher's biases on the research topic. The research partner was a faculty member in a Library Science program. The primary researcher is a 43-year-old Caucasian male who is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Higher Education, and has more than 18 years of experience as a librarian, including the last two as a library director, 60 hours of instruction in Library Science, and a strong passion for libraries, all of which provided a solid framework within which to base this research. According to Van Manen, the only way one can truly question a phenomenon is "to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being" (1990, p. 43).

The researcher's education, experience, and passion also required a bracketing, or a "setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180) of the researcher's presuppositions. This bracketing muted the researcher's preconceived presuppositions and enabled the constituents' voices to be heard. Through the continual use of a reflexive journal, the researcher reflected on his understanding, judgements, and feelings regarding libraries, the research, the participants, and anything else that

could interfere with the phenomenological process, in order to bracket his presuppositions and approach the research as a “beginner.” Further, the researcher conducted the data collection and, with one research partner and member checking, analyzed the data.

### **Participants and selection**

#### **Institutions**

In order to triangulate the data sources, the researcher selected to conduct the researcher at three public research universities in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The specific institutions were selected based on the willingness of the library director to facilitate the data collection.

##### **Institution 1.**

Institution 1 is a land-grant university with more than 30,000 graduate and undergraduate students, 1,400 full-time faculty, and a main campus with satellite facilities. The library consists of a main building and several branches. The main library was undergoing constant renovation, to include moving a significant portion of the information resources to remote storage. The library director reports directly to the chief academic officer.

##### **Institution 2.**

Institution 2 enrolls more than 30,000 graduate and undergraduate students, has more than 2,000 full-time faculty, and a main campus with satellite facilities. The library consists of a main building and several branches, with the main library recently receiving a significant modern addition. The library director reports directly to the chief academic officer.

##### **Institution 3.**

Institution 3's enrollment is more than 8,000 graduate and undergraduate students. There are more than 600 full-time faculty at the main campus and satellite facilities. The library



consists of a main building and several branches, all of which are undergoing constant renovations. The library director reports directly to the chief academic officer.

### **Constituencies**

For the purpose of this work, constituencies are defined based on the multiple-constituencies model of organizational effectiveness as those directly and indirectly associated with an organization “who may form evaluations of its activities, and may be able to influence the activities of that organization to some extent” (Connolly et al., 1980, p. 213). This conceptualization is broad and could include all constituencies of the parent institution, such as accreditors, funders, governments, students’ parents, alumni, the local community, other researchers, and peer institutions. Within that context, the researcher used the academic library constituencies that Cullen and Calvert (1995) identified—resource allocators, senior library staff, other library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

Through understanding the complexities of public research university administration, the researcher knew there were other chief officers at each institution, and each university had a version of a governing board, but he limited the resource allocators to those most likely to be involved with the library on a more-direct basis, the chief executive officer, chief administrative officer, chief research officer, and chief student affairs officer. Further, in contrast to Cullen and Calvert, the researcher limited the senior library staff constituency to only the library director. This was due to the researcher’s experience as a library director and from conversations with other library directors about how different the reality was for the library director from that of anyone else at the university. The remaining constituencies were library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

The researcher contacted the administrative assistant for each of the resource allocators, and directly contacted each of the library directors. Focus group participants within the library staff, faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student constituencies were selected through convenience sampling, orchestrated through an administrative contact within each of the respective libraries. No attempt was made to conduct further purposeful sampling for the focus groups, understanding that, through a phenomenological lens, there were likely no categories beyond the constituency groups that would result in better saturation.

In total, 83 people participated from the three institutions, with one person deciding to have their comments removed and to not continue to participate. That one individual was from the largest group of librarians, so it did not skew the results. Each resource allocator and library director participated, as did at least two individuals in each focus group.

## **Procedures**

### **Data Collection**

The researcher conducted individual phone interviews with each of the resource allocators and library directors. The researcher used focus groups for the other constituencies in order to maximize the potential breadth of experiences.

Working with the administrative representative at each of the three southeastern research universities where the study occurred, the researcher used a convenience sample due to the implausibility of generating a random sample. The target size of each focus group was six to eight participants, but due to timing and availability, actual group sizes ranged between fourteen and two. Each focus group was scheduled to last between 60 and 90 minutes, and each was recorded.

The researcher scheduled thirty-minute phone interviews with each chief executive officer, chief academic officer, chief research officer, and chief student affairs officer. Sixty minutes were allotted for phone interviews with each of the library directors. All interviews were recorded.

The researcher asked open-ended questions (Appendix A) for all interviews and focus groups, frequently asking for fuller descriptions of the experience, and allowing for multiple responses to each of the questions. The questions were developed to encourage the participants to think about the library in a variety of contexts and frames, not simply as a building. The questions, also, did not distinguish, or attempt to limit in any way, what the participant considered the library. For example, at all three sites the library building housed entities that were not hierarchically a part of the library. If the participant described it as part of the experience, it was included as part of the library experience.

The researcher initiated each session by reviewing the informed consent document and providing a brief introduction about the purpose of the study and the type of answers he was requesting. The researcher understood that a person's tendency is often to generalize an experience, so the researcher provided two, non-library-related, examples of experiences to reiterate the importance of first-person accounts. The researcher also indicated that he had a relationship with each library director, but assured the participants their anonymity both with the library director and within the research report.

The focus groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, the library director interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, each, and due to their intense schedules, the resource allocators were interviewed for no more than 30 minutes. These interviews were semi-structured to allow for

adjustments and probing questions as necessary and were recorded, with each participant's permission, for accuracy and transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

The recordings of each interview and focus group were sent to a commercial company for a verbatim transcription, with a promised 99% accuracy rate. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher carefully reviewed each one for accuracy, reviewing the recordings as necessary. The researcher then sent the transcription to the individual participants for a final verification before the analysis began.

Based on the researcher's knowledge and experience in public research university libraries, he thought it important to start "at the beginning" of why the library exists, and equally as important for it to be told from the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the researcher followed an eight-step transcendental phenomenological method of analysis as developed by Moustakas (1994). This method was selected because it provided the most robust method by which to let the participants' voices, and not the researcher's, report the findings. Though each focus group consisted of more than one person, the transcript was treated as though it was an individual interview.

The researcher and his research partner horizontalized all 9 transcripts from one institution, then met to discuss and compare, so that the remaining 18 transcripts would be done in closer alignment. The original and subsequent horizontalization involved several close readings of a transcript to establish a familiarity with it, then significant statements were extracted and preliminarily grouped together.

After all 27 transcripts were horizontalized by both people, the researcher reduced each expression to ensure it was necessary and sufficient to describe the experience. Those expressions that were not complete were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994).

These final invariant constituents were clustered into preliminary themes by the researcher, then discussed with the research partner (Moustakas, 1994). The resulting themes and invariant constituents were then sent to all participants for review and comment, thereby continuing to build trustworthiness by member-checking the researcher's findings. The researcher developed textural descriptions for each of the transcripts, synthesizing the statements and themes, using verbatim examples from the participant, to keep their voices prominent. These individual textural descriptions were then used to develop individual structural descriptions, with the researcher using imaginative variation to uncover "the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words, the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

The researcher combined the textural and structural descriptions for each transcript, to develop an individual textural-structural description. These combined descriptions included the themes, essences, and meanings, with the invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994). These individual textural-structural descriptions were sent to the participants for validation. The last step was to develop a composite textural-structural description, incorporating the changes the participants suggested. This composite description was discussed with the research partner and also sent to the participants for a final validation that the results represented their experiences and that nothing was omitted (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Summary**

The use of a transcendental phenomenological method enabled the researcher to combine the lived experiences of a significant number of key constituencies with the experience and passion of the researcher to develop intersubjective validity of the essence of the library at a public research university. This research captured only part of the essences of the library. As Moustakas (1994) said, “the essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p.100). The results can inform the direction of libraries and the efforts of their respective resource allocators.

Using a reflexive journal, member checking, and providing thick descriptions, the researcher attempted to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter will provide the data developed through the rigorous transcendental phenomenological research process to describe “the essence of the library at a public research university as seen through key constituents’ lived experiences”. It begins with the themes, which were developed by clustering the individual horizons. Representative horizons are listed after each theme as an indicator of the data used to inform the creation of the themes. The chapter concludes with responses to each of the three research questions.

#### Themes

The researcher and his co-researcher reviewed the twenty-seven individual telephone interviews and focus groups with eighty-three participants ranging from undergraduate students through chief executive officers at three public research universities, comprising more than twenty-one hours of transcripts to identify individual horizons—those quotes that capture a moment of the experience that is both “necessary and sufficient” and able to be abstracted and labeled (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). These horizons were subsequently clustered into five themes—The Aspirational Library, Servant Leadership, The Commons, Information Resources, and Stewardship—which collectively, comprise the library. Following are the themes, with a brief description and representative invariant horizons, which are sorted into student, faculty, library personnel, and resource allocator groupings. Each theme is an abstraction and labeling of the meaning constituting the horizon clustering.

#### **The Aspirational Library**

This theme was common across all constituencies except library personnel. Many participants experienced a sense of productivity, of pride, and of inspiration during library

experiences. This sense was what draws people to it and provokes constituents to feel “productive,” “inspired,” “uplifted,” and “intellectually stimulated.” Many of the participants experienced a *knowing* that academic pursuits were improved when involving the library. This involvement included conversations, collaborations, service, space, and information, but was more than any of those aspects. The library encouraged the participants to aspire to be more. Following are horizons from participants that describe this sense.

**Student.**

- I’ve actually thought about it before, I’ve wondered why I feel more productive there...I think it is knowing that there is <sic> so many other people in one location who are all—I know we’re not all studying the same thing, but everyone you see around you is studying and everyone—it just seems like camaraderie almost...if I want I can be in my little hall, I can people watch for a little while...it’s not super-duper quiet but it is quiet enough for you to really focus, to get work done
- There’s no other place I can really spend—every time I go, I spend a solid chunk of time—like 10 hours and I just stay there and do everything I need to do...I feel like there’s no other place that I would feel okay with staying for that long period of time
- I felt really productive—I don’t know what it is about that room, but I feel like I always finish everything that I intend to finish whenever I am over there...maybe it’s just really quiet, or maybe it’s just got a very good environment...I just feel like I only go whenever I have a lot of stuff to do and when I go it’s productive

**Faculty.**

- It’s even today I wonder if I would be more efficient with my day-to-day work if I did it in a wide open space like this in a library where I’m completely anonymous,



- nobody else knows who I am, but I'm also solely focused on the task there and I'm not distracted by all of the other information that's coming in
- Made me become a better professional because of what they'd exposed me to, through the library
  - There is a palpable sense over the duration of the semester of the rarefied air of seriousness. What I mean is that as one draws closer to the end of the term and work is due, the quality of intensity one feels at the library changes. For my own part, since I've found that I have to meet several research deadlines around the same time as my students, the library can function not only as a resource for materials, but also as a space of shared anxiety, in a sense - everyone is there to 'make it happen'
  - Coming up the steps over here and these impossible doors. They're gigantic slabs of granite and have got some shiny grain to them you know [current institution] has made it. Walking up this mass of granite so I high five to myself "we're there."

**Resource allocator.**

- If the university is compared to a town, the library is akin to the cathedral in the town. Even if you don't go in it, it is the representation of aspiration. It's the representation of higher function. The library has to serve that purpose even when it's virtual.
- I got to know the library community. They love the library and of course we all know why
- I'm on campus a lot at night and it is the lighting on the floors it's like a jewel at night it's kind of like a beacon that I think draws people to it. I have this experience when I'm on campus at night when I'm walking across campus that I'm kind of caught by

its beauty. To me it's kind of invitation to come to it. It has some emotional pull to it and especially at night to me it's so strikingly beautiful

- Coming into the library with many of our board members, volunteer leaders, students, parents, people who are part of the community, part of our university community, coming in the evening to celebrate the modern library. We had dignitaries there. We had really all the senior leaders of the university. It was a moment of celebrating that the library is at the heart of the academic enterprise
- More than just a place where you store books; it's where people come together

### **Servant Leader**

Besides The Commons, Servant Leader was the most frequent theme across all constituencies. The researcher, through the phenomenological method, initially had these as two separate themes, but, through phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, arrived at the realization that for most library experiences, the library as servant and the library as leader were inextricably linked. The researcher, having had conversations throughout his career about servant leadership and the library, had to continually bracket his presuppositions to let the horizons speak.

The servant-leader is servant *first*. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13)

Servants, by definition, are fully human. Servant-leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground — they hear things, see things, know things, and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted, they know the meaning of that line from Shakespeare’s sonnet: “They that have power to hurt and will do none. ...” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 42)

Larry Spears, then CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, identified 10 characteristics of the servant-leader: “listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community” (2004, p. 9). These characteristics, through considerable variation in combinations, pervaded the participants’ experiences. According to the participants, the library, both as an institution and as its individual members, was servant-leader to the university community. Following are invariant horizons depicting the library as servant-leader.

**Student.**

- I did not know what I wanted, I did not know what I needed
- I had no idea how to do research, how to cite, I didn’t know anything
- [When] I come here, they really care about you. [They’re] excited about what you are doing
- [She] asked me about my project and got excited about it and led me in a direction that I didn’t even think was possible. That really changed the research process and kind of determined what path my project would take
- I told [the librarian] what my research topic was, she found me a bunch of resources but then even like after a year afterwards occasionally she sent me an email saying “Have you read this article?” or like “I found this, I thought you might be interested

**Faculty.**

- It got very heated, it was fascinating because I'm sitting there and thinking "why in the world would anyone want to do [X]", when [X] is the whole point to [my discipline], but discovering that [X] is imperative for your promotion and your entire livelihood
- It was a real example to me of a very proactive librarian, who managed to pick up, for free, a vital collection which would have cost thousands of dollars, reinforcing the course and opening an interesting lecture to the public
- That's one of numerous things that I've suggested that they acquire from eBay because I do material cultural rescue mission on eBay because I keep thinking that others can't just disappear like this—we've got to get it into a public collection where it is accessible to a broad range of people
- I saw a therapy dog on my way in here and that made all the difference—a therapy dog

**Library personnel.**

- Well, I won't let you fail
- I like to feel like I have passed along my attitude towards books and philosophy of work to help them on their way
- That was one of those days that I went home and I cussed and yelled in my car on the way home and I vented to my wife. It was just really frustrating
- I think they were a little shocked that as a librarian, I cared about textbook affordability

**Resource allocator.**

- During Black History month our [diversity office] and the library partnered to have a read-in...they had different people come and read at different times...I carved some time out to go for a little bit and read...faculty were involved, students were involved, community members were involved...there was a young African-American author who had written some graphic novels...there was a guy after I read that kind of more rapped poems and he was a community member within a wheelchair...I don't really like to read publically, but I was--it felt kind of like hallowed ground...I felt in kind of a sacred space so I felt privileged and maybe honored just to be there
- I went in just to learn more about [X] and I walked out with a really robust setup for [X] but also with some other recommendations about ways in which I could keep my reading current
- This semester the library brought in some keynote speakers...one speaker did a lecture and a Q&A and that to me really exemplified the purpose of the library, it brought a very diverse group of people together, [including] community members...libraries bring people together for discourse and dialog sometimes around difficult subjects
- [Library director] and I initially explored the collaboration where we could bring in speakers that would address topics in the research ethics area...things outside of the mainstream of intellectual content at a university but things that would culturally enrich...we have had this incredible experience where we work together in selecting the speakers, in hosting the speakers...a collaborative scholarly event that has benefitted the entire university...probably if we had tried it on our own and they'd

have tried it on their own there would have been success eventually...that we form this partnership was, I think, critical to not only the success but just the overwhelming success in the response of this university community to these lectures and in fact we haven't had one with that hasn't been filled to capacity

- This morning we are all ready to sit down and say, "How is what we're doing in the library a critical part of how we were are thinking of general education skill building twenty-first century skills to be about?"

### **The Commons**

To the participants, the physical manifestation of the library, outside of the servant leaders, was the building. With the exception of one resource allocator, the participants' experiences indicated a uniqueness to the library building, with that one exception indicating a blurring of the spaces between the library, the classroom, and the student center. Though the same individual also indicated incredulity that, "there's a lot more passion around that from the students about seeing improvements in the library than around anything but parking."

There was a sense of ownership of the library by each constituency. The participants expected the library to be open and accessible to all, serving everyone, including the general public. They indicated that the library was supposed to be available when and where it was needed, often including overnight hours and other times when most of the university was closed. Some participants experienced The Commons as not being as open and accessible as needed, while others experienced it being open too much, causing poor student health and hygiene.

Participants felt that student space for quiet and group study, research, and socializing was prioritized, but faculty and innovation space, collaboration/meeting space, collection space, and community engagement space were also important aspects. Technology was requisite in the

library, ranging from the basics of power and wireless internet to the latest advances, perhaps including 3D printers, technology-enabled collaboration spaces, and digital production studios. Food was a positive experience for some participants and negative for others, particularly faculty. Following are example horizons for The Commons theme.

**Student.**

- I had to write a 10-page research paper and it was due on Thursday and once I had got a computer I had to do things like if I was here the whole day—which I was—I would leave my stuff in front of the computer and like walk home and eat or make dinner and then come back. I couldn't risk not having that computer because I would fail the class if I didn't get the paper done
- I don't remember what I was looking at but I do remember being confused
- I was pulling an all-nighter at the library two weeks ago and I was just trying to read my textbooks
- If you're staying here for all of Thanksgiving, they have limited hours. That's where you can get most of your work done, but the library's closed
- Literally would take like 30 minutes just roaming around just trying to see if there is space available for sitting. But even then it's like you found the spot but it's like, "Oh wait, there's no outlet"
- I remember being disappointed about how many computers there were and how little books there were...I just remember standing and I'm like, "It's a library, why are there computers, where are the books?"
- I came by myself because I really just love books and exploring [the library] and I was just amazed—all of the books, I was just full of wonder at all of the books there

- I don't go to [the library] during exam because people in there are too high-strung, too much stress
- It was really late like 1:00 AM we were just using these spinning chairs and rolling through the library and there weren't a lot of students there...the ones that were gave us dirty looks but we were so tired we didn't really notice it. I like the fact that there was so much free space for us to let off steam after studying and then eventually come back and study after being [able to] just release our energy
- There was a dance performance. I was so interested I was like how can that performance be happening in a library but I watched it and it was really good
- I didn't want to go home, so I went up there [dedicated space]. There [were] two other people in there and they were working on something that I'm passionate about. I overheard them talking, I'm having to write a paper on something similar. I got to ask them specific questions about how that was really in their field and how maybe I can incorporate some of their topics into my field
- I go there to read books
- We all just sat around the room with our laptops doing our work or procrastinating whatever people felt like doing...it was mostly pretty quiet so I could concentrate pretty well, but there was some talking a little bit, which was fine
- It was still kind of frustrating because [this space] is supposed to be the quietest place, not a place to talk
- There'd be markers people had written over in on the actual walls and not the writing board or some piece of technology from the television was missing, so I couldn't use it because someone took something or broke it



- I felt like they just weren't really following like the social rules of the library

### **Faculty.**

- I came in on a Sunday hoping that I was going to get to write in a quiet place. It was so loud, I had to leave. It was terrible!
- The faculty are almost entirely disconnected from the physical library. If it wasn't for me having to be there for certain things, I probably wouldn't come at all anymore. And I'm also pretty surprised that students actually – I know they do use it because I see them, but I don't quite understand why it's happening
- When I walk in the second floor and I see [news] running on a big screen TV...I think that's inappropriate for a library and they ought to make better use of that space in that facility...I understand why there have been many changes over the years in an attempt to bring the students in but like the café and things like that I find frustrating because I feel like this is not the place for that...I think we do have to accommodate that to a point but it just feels like that is privileged above having better collections, having more availability because they are giving up space for all of this...I understand it's a nice thing to have space for students to congregate but in my opinion it takes away from the academic and other uses of the library that are more important
- It is our lab

### **Library personnel.**

- You know what? This is our building, and this is how we want it presented in a clean, approachable way. Stop with that.

- [It] was absolutely hopping—it was really busy—and I had to stop for a second and thought, “Hang on, this is what we were shooting for and it actually worked.” It was like, “Okay, good. People are actually getting this.”
- We wanted a zero-restriction access into the physical building
- We are often the folks who are the only ones here after hours, overnights, weekends, holidays
- There’s a little bit of a lack of community among our graduate students and one of the things we thought we were helping with by creating this [dedicated space] is helping them have a place where they can all go and meet each other
- I look at our floor space for these students and our floor space is shrinking daily to the point where I heard a student walk by the reference desk and say, "I do not know why I even bother to come here anymore. There is never any room." That hurts.

**Resource allocator.**

- It’s less about the physical space, less about books, more about information and how to access it...to say the library, it sounds kind of funny now when I think of the physical building...I don’t think that is going to have meaning in ten years
- There was a student musician in one of the soundproof booths with the sound board, computer equipment, excellent recording microphone and all that...even though I couldn’t hear what was happening in the booth so I can only see through the glass...I just saw the library had created a space where this person could record her music—express herself...without that, would students go off campus to find a recording studio? Will they not record their music at all? It’s hard to know but the impression that I had was just a feeling of gratitude that she had this place and this equipment,

- technology where students could really discover, explore, create and be a part of something unique to them, really authentic to them
- I actually feel quiet, safe, and completely comfortable— ‘Safe’ is not the word—it’s really comfortable, that’s really just totally relaxed and able to really zone out...even if people are talking, it’s always just a comfortable place for me—I think some of it is the books.
  - The university library has welcomed in and created within the library [space] for related activity functions and offices. Recognizing that that’s where students are doing a lot of their studying and learning. It situates this program in a really wonderful visible space
  - It’s the only place on campus, where you walk in and the built-in visualization, which is flat screen LCD, recognizes your device absolutely without requiring a dongle or converter or other wire connectors...it’s all wireless and it’s all beautiful...in a team not even a month ago...a meeting in that space, where we were having a seminar run by the IT Department to look at teaching technology...I was there with my iPad and my iPhone, and they were delivering their seminar materials...I could intercept and I could download and I could do all manner of wonderful stuff in a one-hour seminar
  - I really got my first close look at the new bone-crushing media center
  - I was with my family who was visiting, on a Sunday...school was in session...it’s very quiet on campus and so we walk into the library it is just jam packed—they were elbow-to-elbow and working hard and having great conversations
  - Yesterday, I went there to prepare a presentation...it’s about being around students...the most inspiring thing is people and a major part of that inspiration are

the students—being there and hearing the low-level chatter and working on a little presentation is good...it's just a welcoming, intellectually-inspiring environment

- Sitting there that cold night with my son, watching students run from one group to another because they were clearly working on a project...it was Friday night, which I thought was very unusual but very gratifying, but I also think I saw a lot of happy faces—kids having a real good time and that's what libraries should be—happy places.

### **Information Resources**

As the key component to knowing, information, through its evolving multitude of forms, was the “lifeblood” of the library, and the university. Forms of information included the more-traditional such as print books, electronic journals, websites, and DVDs, while others were not so traditional, such as presentations, collegial discussions, and the creation of new information. Whether general, special, popular, or archival; whether accessed locally or remotely; in physical or digital form; owned, retrieved, or provided by the library; the information resource being used was the library. According to the participants, the ability to access a known item quickly and conveniently was important, but the opportunity to discover other items, often through serendipity while browsing nearby shelves in the physical collection, was also a significant function of the library. Serendipitous discovery was mentioned by all constituency groups. Most participants wanted to be able to have both – immediate remote access and the opportunity for serendipitous discovery. The participants were passionate about their information need and the appropriateness of the information itself, as well as its discovery, access, and use. With some participants experiencing “he cried,” or “I cussed and yelled,” amazement, and wonder; and others being disappointed, “frustrated,” disappointed.

Below are horizons depicting the Information Resources theme.

**Student.**

- I'm doing a paper on artwork that came out of the experiences at Hiroshima. I was researching books here about that and just some really horrible stuff that happened there. Just going to all these different books and reading these books was really etched on my memory
- I saw these two old ladies that looked like they were from the [local] area. They were all dressed up and they had these books that they were going to check out and they were just talking to each other just like having a great time and just really excited about their books. It was just like oh that's so sweet they come here and enjoy it. They just looked really, really happy with what they'd found
- Just this semester I got a number of books through interlibrary loan, but then the due dates all came up before I was really finished with the books
- I had this theme researched for a research paper recently and tried to look up stuff on the online catalog but wasn't having much luck. I found one book in the stacks so I decided to go look at it and then when I found the book there were like all these other books nearby that all like looked pertinent to my research. I got super excited and I sat down on the floor and just like had a mountain of books next to me, and I was looking through them; which is probably obstructive to other people. I just wanted to look through them right there that was exciting

**Faculty.**

- I stopped being frustrated when I stopped coming to the library to look for journals and books off the shelves

- It was like addiction I just wanted to search that database all the time, I was truly thrilled and the existence of that database has made a huge difference in my entire research, my entire research agenda over the last 10 years. It was transformative
- I needed that secondary source and it was only available [from one vendor], and you have to download, it was page by page, and it was so incredibly frustrating that I think I ILL'ed it—the hardcopy
- Sitting at home at 10:30 at night on a Sunday, browsing the library, click on a link, and I've got it within seconds...that ease of use is a constant source of excitement
- I took my students to special collections and special collections has sources even for European history...one of the sources was postcards from [a concentration camp], and the student was absolutely amazed that those exist and she was then looking into that entire ecosystem and it led her to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum where she deepened her research and her paper was one of the best in that class and she was a student who was a little hard to reach in lecture, but she lit up when she was able to contribute something completely new to the course that no one else had thought of
- I was looking at a primary source at the New York Public Library for my book and I don't have the funds or the time to travel to New York and so I just emailed the library liaison and said, "can you help?" "Can this be something that interlibrary loan can get for me and connecting me with the right people?" and then I had this primary source from the 1890's in my inbox as a scan a week later and it was wonderful!
- I found an article in a bound journal and it was printed in 1904. So to find that journal on the stack and pull out a document that was literally published in 1904 and it was

written before the turn of the century was just amazing to me. I really felt like I was standing in history when I did that. It was standing in the stacks with that and the dusty old smell of this very, very old bound journal. I wondered when I picked it up when was the last time thing came off the stack, how long has it been. That's older than my grandparents

- I definitely do less browsing, so I'm exposed to less sort of related material than I used to kind of absorb, and I don't know what came of it in terms of how it affected my productivity...but I think I suspected it did a little bit having seen something, having read something that I would not have read just because it was in that issue of the journal that you picked up—your efficiency is increased but perhaps your creativity is— “so basically there's something gained and there's something lost.”

#### **Library personnel.**

- This gentleman came in... and he's like I heard you have a first edition [X]...this was a first for me, he cried. And that's why I do what I do. And that's why I won't deny somebody...it's nice to be reminded that's it's not just me who is engaged with this stuff, it's anybody
- We used to have this huge [subject] collection and years ago it was rarely used and then we did a major weeding of it and then all of a sudden, they started flying off the shelves...all that work we spent all summer, the weeding, has brought these wonderful materials to light

#### **Resource allocator.**

- I was looking for a book and I found the book but then I got distracted by other titles around it that were related topically but some that weren't and so for me that in kind

- of a mystically sort of way kind of draws you in and I find it pretty relaxing just to be in the stacks and being able to look at books and the content of the books and authors and how one thing leads you to another
- I need to bring myself up to speed so I can talk to my experts more effectively...that was this morning's experience where I just can't do that without the library—it's just not available
  - [Author] came and gave the lecture...the library is kind of at the core of the university, it's kind of its heart and it's a place that kind of draws people to it both for intellectual stimulation but also kind of feeding up the soul and her lecture was much the same—a varied group of people...it allowed me to kind of reflect to my own experience it was just a very uplifting and stimulating

### **Stewardship**

“The responsible use of resources, esp. money, time, and talents” (Stewardship). Making available the conceptually limitless information, servant-leaders to enable, and spaces to engage, with limited resources required the library to be a good steward of all its resources, including money, time, talents, but also space, information, and especially the pursuit of the library's purpose. Student participants' experiences did not include this theme, but it was common among the other constituencies. According to the majority of participants, there was an acknowledgement that the library was not resourced sufficiently to meet all needs, especially the incomparable annual increases in subscription costs.

Following are representative horizons of the Stewardship theme.



**Faculty.**

- We take the library completely for granted because it's always there—we don't even think about it—we don't give it a second thought...well of course it is, of course we've got the library, of course everything I need is at my fingertips and it will always be there

**Library personnel.**

- I love it when I can make a choice that's maybe not even popular or a little misunderstood and then people can see that it works
- There was something maybe a year ago or so, and we all really wanted it. We thought it was going to happen. It's so expensive, and you have to balance, what can we do here for this discipline? What can we do there? It was just too much!
- I spend a lot of time trying to give constructive feedback, and help people grow, and become more self-aware of areas that they might need to be attentive to. I feel like that's why I make a bigger salary, that's why I'm the library director. If I'm not brave enough to do that with the people that report to me, how can I ask people below me to do that? You always hope that you're helping people grow
- During and after the great recession the university continued to cut personal funding lines in the library at a time when we needed more and more, but at the same time not only continued to support the collections budget but to support inflation increases in the collection budget. If you got to [a certain point], you wouldn't be able to any longer spend the money for the collections, you just couldn't. It wasn't good stewardship

**Resource allocator.**

- I remember feeling maybe conflicted because the students had a very legitimate need and [the library director] had a real impulse to want to meet their need but also had budget constraints
- The library infrastructure in particular is the one that's easiest to forget about, because we take it for granted

These representative horizons indicate the emotion evoked through positive and negative library experiences—the participants were passionate in their expectations, which conveyed to high positives and low negatives. These horizons also indicate how few experiences involve only one theme. The essence of the library phenomenon is a complex interplay of these five themes. Two resource allocator horizons warrant inclusion in their entirety as they explicate much of the essence of the library.

You understand the Army to be an integrated thing. You understand it's a group. When you are in that vehicle, whatever it is, a Huey or a Humvee with your guys, you are connected to all of the rest of the integrated thing which is the Army, writ large. Fed, housed, ammunition, water, medicine, medical care, all that stuff is integrated. Well I see the university in very much the same way, it's almost impossible for me, understanding how the information flow of the university depends on the library as the portal to these and as the portal to all the paywall stuff. To me that's almost the ammunition-supply trains for the faculty. You really can't disconnect that - or maybe it's even more important-the food supply, you can't disconnect that from the front line faculty. Faculty no longer are isolated brains, sitting at that Jeffersonian desk in an ivory tower. They are, in many cases, part of teams, part of teams even when it's a humanities or art subject,

parts of teams who work together and the infrastructure is an incredibly important part of it. The library infrastructure in particular is the one that's easiest to forget about, because we take it for granted. Like food, fuel, ammunition supply trains that reach out to that forward observer - that guy dies if anyone of those three things stops. He withers on the vine, or he's overtaken, right?

I sat crisscross on the floor, put the stack of books to my right, and I just started looking at them. It was great because no one knew who I was so it was at that time, a fun, comfortable place to be. I would say the smell reminded me of all the smells that I remembered being a graduate student in particular. The books I guess were like a paper smell. Maybe it's the backs of the book. I don't know but there's a smell that libraries have and I remember that smell. I remember looking over the tops of the stack. The second shelf just to see if people were around and every so often, I'd see people coming and going but not very many since it was a Saturday. What I liked most is that it was a lot of solitude and it was an opportunity to just get lost in the books and to focus on what I was working on.

The researcher, using phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, then constructed a composite textural-structural description of the library experience that combines the texture, the *what*—the feelings, qualities— of the experience as developed through phenomenological reduction; and the structure, the *how*—act, “concretely complete intensive mental process” (D. Moran, 2000, p. 156)—of the experience as developed through imaginative variation. This composite textural-structural description is the essence of the library for these participants, at this time, as intersubjectively reflected upon by the researcher.

### Results for Research Question 1

RQ1: What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a public research university?

The essence is explicated through the composite textural-structural description. What follows is this description, with the sections in quotation marks being excerpts from participant's horizons.

The library is an experience of high expectations, whether it is through imagination, perception, or judgement. The intense hopes and disappointments are heightened by the passion of every constituency, particularly those within the library. The desire to promote the ideals of a public research university—while knowing that economic realities conspire against the best attempts—enable “despair”, “hurt”, “disgust”, anger, and general frustration to fester in the community. The library, a “hallowed ground”, “uplifting and stimulating” in its sincerity to “represent the higher function—the library *has* to serve that purpose”. A plea, a demand, a visceral pining for the library to be aspirational, to inspire—to be a “jewel” ...a “beacon” emitting an “invitation to come to it, some emotional pull.”

“A sense of community”, within which all participants were proud, vested owners of the library, treasuring its influence in their individual and collective lives; a reverence for the fully-engaged library, a pride and a longing for “rich” and robust “I-won't-let-you-fail” experiences, and trust that the library will fulfill its purpose. People place their trust in the library, they challenge it to be better than they are, to be *the best of us*, to be exemplar servant leaders. The library is a safety line—a place of refuge—where all users are free to learn, grow, change. It has “made me become a better professional because of what they'd exposed me to, through the library.”

Passion, care, and concern run true and deep in library personnel and is tangible through the library service, though the service occasionally fails to meet users' or the library's expectations. Failures to go *the extra mile*, which is the overwhelmingly agreed upon standard, or even basic service, will prompt some to say, "whatever...I'll figure it out by myself" (student), "I stopped being frustrated when I stopped coming to the library" (faculty), or "Dude, that sucks!" (library). When the service is successful, it can surprise the recipients not in the success, or that it was more than they expected, but in a way that provokes, "I didn't even think was possible. That really changed the research process and kind of determined what path my project would take" and "I went in just to learn more about [X] and I walked out with a really robust [the tool] but also with some other recommendations about ways in which I could keep my reading current."

Most experiences occur with and within the physical building, a space that simultaneously "draws people to it" and discourages people from venturing in. A place that many feel promotes a, seemingly inexplicable, attitude of productivity, with the "low-level chatter", an opportunity to be around others who are similarly engaged evokes an energy, a "camaraderie", is the same place that can promote unhealthy "hygiene and cleanliness" and engender a "too high-strung" environment that "it's so packed and there is so much stress, you can really feel it in the air." The lack of sufficient space, of appropriate resources— "Oh wait, there's no outlet!", of enough of anything— "I couldn't risk not having that computer because I would fail the class if I didn't get the paper done!", "it's a library, why are there computers, where are the books?", and "a little overwhelming and somewhat confusing." prompts some to ponder "mission creep?" Faculty, in particular, feel neglected or abandoned, feeling "almost entirely disconnected from the physical library." "It was so loud, I had to leave. It was terrible!"

This same place makes some “feel quiet, safe, and completely comfortable”, “watching people come and go, watching people laugh and have fun, watching students run from one group to another because they were clearly working on a project.” It is a place “for intellectual stimulation, but also kind of feeding of the soul” ...a “fellowship.” The library partners with others at the university to create a “welcoming, intellectually inspiring environment,” “more and better learning environments with and for our students”, and to “culturally enrich”, with “collaborative scholarly events that benefit the entire university”, bringing “very diverse group[s] of people together for discourse and dialog sometimes around difficult subjects.” These experiences “encourage thoughtful dialog and thoughtful discussion” and promote a “stickiness” within the university community. Some discussions, where library directors may believe “I think they were a little shocked that as a librarian, I cared about,” enhance and then alleviate institutional stress, through collective discussion which can become “very heated,” especially when the topic is “imperative for your promotion and your entire livelihood.”

This place can inspire professional colleagues and the community to “ratify that we arrived”, faculty to proudly state, “walking up this mass of granite, I high five myself— “we’re there.” Concurrently, the library can be “absolutely hopping”, a “locus of activity”, “packed, but it was vibrant”, with people “elbow-to-elbow”, and a place to “zone out,” be “totally relaxed,” and “get lost in the books and be mindful.” It is a place where students “really cherish their time in the library”, a “living laboratory”, a place for “creativity and innovation”, that may have a “bone-crushing media center”, places that allow users to “really discover, explore, create and be a part of something unique to them, really authentic to them” and sigh, “I was just full of wonder at all of the books there” or “I really felt like I was standing in history...with the dusty old smell of this very, very old bound journal.”

Information is the *calling card* of the library, and in this, too, there is joy and there is sorrow. Information, the “lifeblood of the university” is for “inspiration”, to “bring myself up to speed,” and that can “fly off the shelves”, be “like addiction,” “transformative,” leave things “etched on my memory,” or “this was a first for me—he cried.” Tension arises in balancing in the world where users simultaneously want instantaneous access remotely when the library may be closed and the ability to leisurely “browse” the collection for “serendipitous discovery.” In essence, “there’s something gained and there’s something lost.” Adding to that tension is “the increased costs on serials is just, it’s outstanding!” This tension can cause “almost despair” in library personnel or make them “cuss and yell in my car on the way home and I vented to my wife.”

Balance and tension were “palpable” in many experiences. Tension about how “ridiculous” it is for the library to not be open when the students need it and promoting “hygiene and student health” while also feeling conflicted by the student’s needs and the library’s fiscal realities. Library personnel, especially the directors, have to be brave, strategic, effective communicators, who are willing to make the difficult decisions about allocating limited resources while realizing that “as library personnel, you’re often just invisible,” with faculty and administrators openly admitting that “we take the library completely for granted because it’s always there...we don’t even think about it.” Strong stewardship, effective leadership, and a passion for the library purpose are critical for the library director...there is “never an *easy button*.”

### **Results for Research Question 2**

RQ2: How does this essence align with current practice and theory?

The data indicate a basic alignment between the essence—as described in the preceding section, and current practice and theory. Library operations and theory revolve around the structure—the acts, the *how*—of the experiences. The increased emphasis on user experience assessment and research, the reallocation of library personnel to enable the constituencies’ acts, and the efforts dedicated to communicating the value of the library to all constituencies, but particularly to the resource allocators, are aligned with the acts each of the five themes, touching, to differing degrees, the underlying needs of the constituencies. Current operations and theory on space utilization, service provision, information resources, and the complexities of being good stewards align closely with those corresponding themes.

There is a disconnect between operations and theory and the theme of the Aspirational Library. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, most operations and theory dismiss this theme, focusing more on the intuitive aspects of the experiences. Architecturally, there are efforts to inspire and attract people, but that is where the aspirational component ends in contemporary operations and theory.

The data indicate general alignment between current operations and theory and the texture—the emotions, the *what*—of the experience. Conferences are held around the tension points of libraries, particularly The Commons and Information Resources themes. Much of the library scholarship is on how libraries can serve additional needs of the university to become central, less “taken for granted,” and contribute to the quantitative assessment criteria of the university, namely, recruitment, retention, progression, and graduation of students and faculty teaching and research success. An initial review of the horizons indicates the intent of the library to meet the needs of the constituencies, though simultaneously needing successful stewardship to balance the needs with available resources. It does not, however, deal with the “intellectual



purpose” of the institution—the “higher function.” That disconnect, however, was revealed through the researcher’s deep reflection on the horizons, and will be explained in detail in Chapter 5.

### **Results for Research Question 3**

RQ3: What implications do these findings have on research universities and their libraries?

The results of this research indicate two key areas of interest for research universities and their libraries—actions and intentions. The data indicate a general alignment of the actions of the library and the actions performed by the constituencies. Theory indicates the appropriateness of information resources, so libraries operations provide those resources. Both theory and operations strongly prioritize immediate access over serendipitous discovery. There is also a contemporary prioritization of user space over information resources, which is not reflective of the themes or the participants experience of the library. Rather, the experiences indicate an expectation of equality between information resource space and user space. Stewardship was applicable in both the research and contemporary theory and operations. The findings indicate that this is understood, not ideal, but also not likely to change.

The data indicate the most significant implication for research universities and their libraries deals with the aspirational library. The emphasis is on outputs and assessment, whereas the data imply there is a deeper purpose to the library that transcends mere outputs or functions that are easily assessable.

The data do not correspond to intentions of either the institution or the participants. Therefore, that portion of this question will be address as part of the findings. It will be covered, in depth, in Chapter 5.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher provided the essence of the library at a public research university as seen through the lived experiences of eighty-three participants at three public research universities representing the chief executive officer, chief administrative officer, chief research officer, chief student affairs officer, library director, library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. It provided representative horizons, organized by the five overlapping themes, and the responses to the three research questions, including a composite textural-description of the essence. In Chapter 5, the researcher will discuss the findings and provide recommendations for future efforts.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the findings and recommendations for future efforts as a result of the research. It begins with a grounding of the researcher's inspiration for undertaking the research, continues with the findings and a comparison of these findings with those presented in the literature review, and concludes with recommendations for the profession and further study.

The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the library at a public research university from the library's key constituencies' lived experiences. Within a transcendental phenomenological structure and through the researcher's Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation, to develop a composite textural and structural description of the library at this time, in these institutions, and with these research participants. The study also explored whether there were differences among different constituency groups or among the institutions.

#### Research Questions

1. What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a public research university?
2. How does this essence align with current practice and theory?
3. What implications do these findings have on research universities and their libraries?

The researcher, having spent more than twenty years learning about, working in, talking about, and leading academic libraries, has a passion and desire to enable these units to be as successful as they can be. Over the course of his career, the researcher became more disenchanted with the direction of the profession and with what was happening, in particular, to public research university libraries. Though the actions may be appropriate, he did not sense that

they were grounded in what the library's purpose truly was—not that the researcher knew what that purpose was, but there seemed to be something *fundamental* missing from the profession. Through the researcher's progression through a Ph.D. program in Higher Education, he learned about the Phenomenological research method, and realized this was his opportunity to help establish that fundamental anchor for the profession (audacious). Phenomenology was a “return to the things themselves” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), but was also rooted through the researcher's worldview. The research process and the findings were cathartic to the researcher, enabling him to delve into the profession in a valid manner and present an opportunity for public research university libraries to reframe themselves.

### **Limitations**

In establishing the trustworthiness of these findings, this research has the following potential limitations the sampling method and sample sizes, the participants' willingness to answer truthfully and provide full descriptions, and failure of the researcher to effectively bracket his presuppositions.

The initial selection of nine constituencies provided for a stratified sample. Further, with participation by representatives in each constituency at all three sites, there was representation across a diverse population. Where the limitation occurs is within the sampling method, namely convenience, for selecting participants for the faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student focus groups. There were, across the three sites, at least two participants for each of these constituency focus groups, with total participants being thirteen (13) faculty, eight (8) graduate students, and seventeen (17) undergraduate students. No regard was made to any demographic information of the participants. Additionally, the three public research universities selected,

though in different communities, were all geographically co-located within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. These limitations may reduce the dependability of the findings.

Participants may have been predisposed to provide positively-skewed experiences, either consciously or unconsciously. The focus group environment may have gathered additional experiences from some through thought-triggering, but being around institutional peers may have discouraged participants from sharing other, important experiences. In addition to assuring confidentiality of participants and responses, the researcher intentionally used provocative questions to encourage participants to share all memorable lived experiences. This affects the credibility of the findings.

Finally, the researcher may not have effectively bracketed his presumptions throughout the research process. From developing the interview protocol, through conducting the interviews and focus groups, and especially during the iterative phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation phases. The researcher used member-checking and a reflexive journal throughout the study to address this limitation. This limitation affects all trustworthiness aspects of these findings.

## **Findings**

### **Research Question 1**

RQ1: What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a public research university?

The findings of this research indicate that the essence of the library at a public research university is *intersubjective communication*. The provocation and enabling of users to challenge their current knowledge in a manner that builds greater understanding.

Throughout intersubjective communication, “In reciprocal understanding, my experiences and experiential acquisitions enter into contact with those of others, similar to the contact between individual series of experiences within my experiential life...a unification is brought about or at least is certain in advance as possibly attainable by everyone” (Husserl, 1970a, p.163).

In intersubjective communication the persons are testing out their understanding of each other and their knowledge of something, “sifting out intrusive phrases void of meaning...exposing and eliminating errors which here too are possible, as they are in every sphere in which validity counts for something” (Husserl, 1931, p.256). In the back and forth of social interaction the challenge is to discover what is really true of the phenomena of interpersonal knowledge and experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57).

If the essence of the library is *intersubjective communication*, then its purpose should be to promote *intersubjectivity* at the parent public research university. These findings suggest that information is a critical aspect of the library, but it is not the overarching purpose. Much of the current research about the important role libraries play in providing access to information is still relevant and purposeful, including the Library Bill of Rights and ACRL’s Standards for Libraries in Higher Education. This research suggests another frame from which to view this role. As one of the key resources for *intersubjectivity*, information is vital to the university, and, as the locus of *intersubjectivity* at the university, it is simply logical that this is a function provided by the library.

The library is the composite of the five themes, but it is the summation of those themes that make it a library. Each theme, separately, is a necessary component of the holistic library experience, but none is sufficient, in itself. No theme stands alone—each overlaps with the

others as aspects, both intuitive and signitive, of every intentional library experience. The researcher could have used each horizon as representing multiple themes. These findings will be described more fully within the five themes.

### **The aspirational library.**

There is a longing, a strident, unspoken demand for the library to serve a deeper purpose with everyone. The concept of the library, as well as its physicality, create a desire for active learning, being intentionally present (not passively receiving), and an integration of new knowledge into an individual's worldview. The tenor of the positive and negative experiences was that everyone desired that deeper connection, the *intersubjective* experience, the opportunity to grow, learn, or be productive. The researcher proposes that this is what was meant by the aforementioned metaphor of the "library is the heart of the university." The *heart* is the courage, the spirit, the desire to be better...to strive for the ideal. It is the *anchor* of the public research university. The library *is* "a symbol of the intellectual purpose of the institution" (Lynch et al., 2007, p. 226), which includes the aspirational aspect. There is a *rarified air* of productivity and seriousness, balanced with fun and laughter. Everyone *owns* the library, including those not directly associated with the university. Of the themes, it is the least *definable*, but the most *knowable*.

### **Servant leadership.**

Richness was a recurring word choice, indicating a depth to the service beyond a basic transaction. There is an internal conflict within libraries regarding service and leadership, and what issues are appropriate for the library to address. This research clarifies that slightly, but also muddies it, in that, by having more of a phenomenological mindset, library personnel are effective participants in all conversations by helping bracket presumptions and investigate

*intersubjectively*. Service is insufficient to encompass the expectations of the constituencies, who expect the library to also lead in those areas it serves. In understanding the proper relationship of service and leadership in libraries, the researcher proposes the servant-leader model, which, upon continued reflection, is exactly what the library is, and how many of the librarians (and a sizable number of staff who choose to work in libraries) are.

There are few library experiences when there aren't many levels and facets. To use the Chinese proverb of a poor man and a fish—those who come may not know they need a fish, but, while the library experience may give them a fish, the library also teaches them *how* to fish, AND, most importantly, works with them to understand *why* they need a fish in the first place.

Literature is replete with the library's primary emphasis on serving—serving individuals, groups, the institution, and more broadly; in person or remotely; or directly, indirectly, or enabling self-service. What most of this literature misses, however, is the importance of the library leading, too.

Of particular potential is for the library to not just serve the university, but to lead it. There is a sense in the library community, that we can only react or respond to what is happening. In considering the ARL 2030 Scenarios (2010), where the emphasis is on how the library responds to external dynamics, it does not consider the library being one of those dynamics to influence the research environment. What would happen if the library led the university community, as a servant leader, in the reclamation of *intersubjectivity* as a primary purpose? What effect would that have on the external dynamics, and how would it affect the future of the public research university, higher education, and society?

Leadership by example; by convening, partnering, and participating in discussions critical to the public research university community; through individual and collective action; through



transparency, inclusivity, accessibility, and security; and by continually asking the right questions— “If a group is confronted by the right questions long enough, they will see through to the essence and find the right way” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 67).

### **The commons.**

The Commons applies to all library spaces, not just to individual sections that may be labeled as a type of commons—they are proudly *owned* by the entire community, not just students. Comfort, safety, openness, and accessibility are keystones to the library (and, not coincidentally, critical components for *intersubjective communication*). People need to feel comfortable, in all ways possible, to embark on the *intersubjective* journey the library promotes. People need to be safe (data protection and patron privacy) for the same reason as needing to feel comfortable. The library needs to be open to all and provide access to all information in order to challenge all presumptions. Collections are a critical component of the space utilization, but so are introspective areas, community gathering spaces, areas for creation, for reading, for discussion, and for socializing. All of these actions are means for *intersubjective communication*.

Universally, there was not enough properly configured, easily discoverable, and flexible space to meet multiple, evolving needs. There is also a tension in balancing health, hygiene, and cleanliness with demands for 24/7 access.

### **Information resources.**

There was a simultaneous demand to satisfy information seekers’ needs for efficiency vs. creativity—immediate access to information needed regardless of when and where it is needed; and, the serendipitous discovery encouraged through appropriate taxonomic organization of print collections. There needs to be a balance between immediate access and creative discovery – in all media...but everything needs to be discoverable. *To collect, preserve, and provide access to*

*information*, is an essential component of the *intersubjectivity* purpose of the library. Without unfettered and safe access to all information, true *intersubjectivity* is not possible.

Unfettered and safe access to information resources, in all varieties, is a critical theme of the library, but it is not the purpose. Information is a means to the *intersubjective* discussions necessary for true progress. It is a vital component, along with the other library themes, in the library's ability to facilitate constituencies' ability to challenge their current perspectives – to *intersubjectively* engage with the new information in order to know differently from before.

### **Stewardship.**

There are not enough people to meet all of the *intersubjectivity* needs of the university. There is not enough space in the physical building, and what space is available does not provide sufficient environmental conditions for all constituents. The existing spaces may not be conducive to all, any, appropriate modes of *intersubjectivity*. The world of information continues to expand, as do user's expectations for access and use of that information. These struggles that libraries deal with on a daily basis—too many demands and too few resources, are not due to lack of alignment with its role as the *Intersubjectivity Crossroads Community*. In fact, as units within a broader organization dealing with the same issues, it would be inappropriate for the library to have all of its needs fully satisfied. Added to that is the complexity inherent in public research universities and the multitude of needs for *intersubjectivity* from the wide range of constituencies that may not coincide, and may, in actuality, conflict, with one another. Meeting these demands, through a prioritization of the library's human, physical, and fiscal resources requires effective stewardship—perhaps more so in the library than for any other unit at the university.

## Research Question 2

RQ2: How does this essence align with current practice and theory?

In response to Lynch et al. (2007), these findings propose a response to their key recommendations that the library needs “research that offers a relevant model for use in those settings” (p.227), and “to determine what the university values, and how to speak about those things to make clear the contributions of the library toward enhancing or furthering these values” (p.225). These findings challenge the basic presupposition of libraries at public research universities, namely, that their purpose is to collect, preserve, and provide access to information. Altbach and Salmi (2011) detailed the mission of public research universities as

- Commitment to disinterested research—knowledge for its own sake—as well as to the more practical elements of research and its use in contemporary society
- The best and brightest students, who are committed to the institution’s ethos
- Allowing “time for reflection and critique and for a consideration of culture, religion, society, and values. The spirit of the research university is open to ideas and willing to challenge established orthodoxies.”
- Firm link to society
- Academic freedom and open inquiry (p.16).

All of these aspects are inputs, means, and outcomes of *intersubjective communication*, and, therefore, support the researcher’s proposal that the purpose of the library at a public research university is to promote *intersubjectivity*.

The findings contradict much of what the current literature says about libraries at public research universities—libraries *ARE* central...just not in the manner Grimes (1998) investigated. As Grimes indicated, when proposing a new metaphor of *Crossroads Community*, for the

academic library, “the library that loses sight of its mission by focusing instead on the mode of “transportation” or technology, if it survives at all, will not remain an important contributor to the community and its needs” (1998, p. 120). This researcher proposes that many libraries—the profession, itself—have lost sight of their mission by focusing on a means of that mission—the information. The concept of *crossroads community* appears valid, confirming Grimes’ original suggestion. Incorporating the newly-proposed purpose of *intersubjectivity* into Grime’s metaphor, provides what is proposed as the most appropriate metaphor for the library at a public research university, an *Intersubjectivity Crossroads Community*.

The symbolic role of the library, as they described, is captured by the Aspirational Library theme proposed in this research. It was considered important to many participants, but, unlike with either Grimes’ or Lynch’s research, it was not a focus of this research. “In an emblematic sense, academic administrators still view the library as the heart of the university, a symbol of the intellectual purpose of the institution” (Lynch et al., 2007, p. 226).

*Intersubjectivity* is more the intellectual purpose of the institution, than simply information is.

Contrary to the “Value” proposition by Oakleaf (2010), it is imperative for the library to deepen its function, return to its essence of *intersubjectivity*—provoking (as necessary), promoting, participating in, and providing information for, *intersubjective communication* around the critical issues facing the university. This research can be instrumental, however, in defining how the library provides value with its new purpose, and not solely on one component of that purpose.

In alignment with the LibQUAL+ survey, which focuses on Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place, three of the themes identified through this research were Servant Leadership (Affect of Service), The Commons (Library as Place), and Information

Resources (Information Control). Stewardship and The Signitive Library were not appropriate for the LibQUAL+ survey.

Where they were accurate, as all studies, cited and not, also indicate, is that the library's resourcing is not commensurate with the demands placed on it.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3: What implications do these findings have on research universities and their libraries?

There are many overlapping implications among all of the findings, but the ones that have that are most significant are intersubjectivity, servant leadership, and the aspirational library. These findings have major implications on the library profession, writ large; librarian education; and the operations, support, and expectations of individual libraries at public research universities. These implications require focused effort in each of these areas, while coordinating across all aspects of libraries at public research university and their constituencies. What follows are only some possible implications.

#### **Professional implications.**

The Association of College and Research Libraries and the Association of Research Libraries, to name just two organizations who have resources that individual public research university libraries do not, should lead efforts to validate and then conduct empirical research based on this researcher's findings.

Further, funders, such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Department of Education (DoE) should allocate appropriate resources for research around these findings, to include whether this purpose applies to libraries in situations other than at a public research university.

***Intersubjectivity.***

*Intersubjectivity*, though necessitating the collection, preservation, and provision of information, is a deepening of the responsibility of the library in the functioning of the university and utilization of information in all media. Most of the library profession's focus has been on information as the core guiding principle, whereas, these findings indicate that *intersubjectivity*, and the provocation and enabling of users to challenge their current knowledge in a manner that builds greater understanding, is the core guiding principle—the essence.

In the library profession, librarians will need to understand what *intersubjectivity* means, grapple with the library's role in the university, and possibly reconsider what being a librarian means and what the requirements should be for librarians. Possible responsibilities of an *intersubjectivity librarian* could include facilitating individual and group *intersubjective* communication, designing *intersubjectivity* space, partnering with faculty in disciplines to expand their efforts as well as with administrators in accomplishing the same. It will require sufficient grounding in phenomenology, mediating techniques, how to create and maintain comfort and safety for library visitors, identification of appropriate information for intersubjective communication – how to get to the essences and not simply superficiality.

Because collecting, preserving, and providing access to information is still vital, current efforts should continue to assess and improve this responsibility. Efforts will need to be made, however, to ensure those efforts align with the purpose, and not simply as a purpose unto itself. For example, might the current efforts around scholarly communication and dealing with ever-increasing subscription prices, to include open access; metrics for evaluation, promotion, and tenure; and alternative forms of scholarship, be enhanced by reframing it within

*intersubjectivity*? This shift could result in a divesting of current pursuits as they no longer align with the purpose, as well as an investment in pursuits newly germane to the profession.

***Servant leadership.***

This research is not the first to propose the servant leadership model for libraries as a focus for the library profession (Anzalone, 2007), but is the first to propose it based on phenomenological research. The Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA) a division of the American Library Association, should lead the profession's efforts in researching, understanding, embracing, becoming, and assessing themselves as servant leaders. This applies to both individuals as servant leaders and the library, as an institutional servant leader.

***The aspirational library.***

How does the library fulfill this expectation? How does the library de-couple the “library is the heart of the university” metaphor from an expectation of entitlement or operational centrality? By working with architects, researchers, constituencies, and others, the library profession should provide guidance on how to embrace this responsibility at the local level, while cautioning against the previous conflation of *heart* and *operational centrality*.

**Librarian education.**

The current models of librarian education focus on the Masters of Library Science, or a variation, thereof, at the Masters' level, as the terminal degree. This has had implications for the status of the librarian at local institutions – are they teaching or research faculty, professional faculty, staff, or something else? Are the librarians peers, colleagues, support personnel, or something else of teaching and research faculty? What is the library's role in the institution's decision-making process?

The introduction of *intersubjectivity* as the guiding principle, implies a reconsideration of these and other current practices and questions. Effective facilitation of *intersubjectivity* requires a closer partnership with faculty and more involvement in the policy-making of the institution to effect the changes necessary. The researcher proposes that *intersubjectivity* will require further study, resulting in a doctorate, either professional or research.

One major question that will then face the profession is how does this '*intersubjectivity librarian*' relate to contemporary library roles such as liaison, assessment, cataloging and metadata, or discovery services? Will there be a tiered librarian system? Will this new responsibility be considered something *else*? The researcher suggests that, with librarian efforts oriented towards *intersubjectivity*, many current librarian responsibilities will remain at the librarian level, with some being relegated to other positions, and, still others possibly being added. For reasons other than *intersubjectivity*, this is already in practice at some institutions.

#### **Local implications.**

At the local institution, this realignment could result in considerable change and disruption. This deeper role in the university would necessitate a closer relationship with faculty and a reconsideration of the status of librarians within the university. It might require a reorganization of personnel to recognize the shift in focus, perhaps another category of personnel, those previously considered librarians, but which, based on a new description of librarian, would be considered a trade. There could be a reconsideration on the design of library spaces, to include a stronger need for physical collections that enable the serendipitous discovery necessary for *intersubjectivity*.

The ramifications could be considerable, which, in the near-term, would cause even more tension in balancing the existing needs and limited resources with new expectations and



uncertainty. They could also create conflict with the parent university, accrediting bodies, and funding agencies, as they may recognize only the former purpose of the library, and consider any efforts outside of that purpose to be misaligned. Though there are many possibilities at each institution, the researcher will provide one example of the implications at an individual public research university.

***One possibility.***

The library director understands and accepts the new purpose, with its associated components, and begins working with the changing librarian profession and librarian educators to develop the fuller understanding and skills to facilitate the necessary conversations and transformations necessary to fulfill the purpose. Concurrently, through servant leadership, the director begins working with university administrators and faculty to situate the library appropriately to fulfill this new purpose, while working within the library to assume this new purpose.

The library director, who will be responsible for facilitating all of the necessary changes, begins by being named the University Librarian and Vice-Chief Academic Officer for *Intersubjectivity* (UL, for short). Along with the title, the position becomes a faculty position with tenure and the associated protection for academic freedom. This title, position, and authority situates the UL for the necessary conversations and efforts to promote, enable, and resource *intersubjectivity* across the institution. A title of Dean would be too limiting, even considering the traditional stereotypes associated with librarian. Academic freedom protection is essential in order for the UL to challenge the status quo in areas such as promotion and tenure guidelines and open access.

Because the transformation of the library will require considerable support and additional resources, the first priority is to make the case for this evolved purpose to resource allocators, funders, accrediting bodies, and the necessary partners, which the UL accomplishes through series of *intersubjective communication* opportunities and by modeling the concept with volunteer academic faculty. As one of the first institutions beginning the transition, this university will be prototyping much, due to no data being available regarding assessment, costs, or specific operational changes. The UL will apply for outside funding, such as from IMLS, to offset the resources needed.

Within the library, the UL will enable experimentation on how to provoke *intersubjectivity* throughout all library experiences. In particular, because it will be more complex, investigating how to apply this through virtual library experiences, such as with distance education students. Three areas of the library that will be heavily affected are the information resources, the librarians, and the commons.

For information resources, virtual, or blended reality may be instrumental in merging the experiences, blurring distinctions between physical information resources and virtual ones for serendipitous discovery. For example, all information resources are “shelved” on virtual bookshelves according to an appropriate taxonomic organization, and the investigator can *see* a physical book between an online journal article and a recording of a speech, which are one shelf away from a current exhibit on a related subject and upcoming opportunities to engage with experts. This blended reality would apply regardless of the investigator’s location.

It will be essential to integrate and safeguard the library’s values of open, safe, and confidential access to all information for everyone in this complex environment. The blended reality would facilitate a more space-conscious allocation of the commons space providing the

best of immediate remote access and the joy of serendipitous discovery. Until that occurs, however, it will become more complicated in dealing with these competing needs.

Librarians, and all library personnel, will have to learn and develop ways to integrate these findings into their efforts. Perhaps learning new skills, reframing criteria used for decision making, changing their own perspectives on their place and responsibility at the university, and realigning their relationships with faculty. Questions such as, “how to describe information resources to promote *intersubjectivity*,” “how to allocate the information resource budget to meet the ever-growing needs, while accommodating both immediate remote access and serendipitous discovery,” and, “how to incorporate *intersubjectivity* into the library’s instruction efforts?”

For example, the current model of a liaison librarian could be repurposed to be the *subject intersubjectivity librarian*, learning skills to facilitate *intersubjectivity*, working more closely and deeply with faculty to integrate this into, not only their experiences, but also the students’ experiences. There could be a need for elevated pedagogical understanding by the librarian to partner with the faculty subject matter expert on how the library can facilitate *intersubjectivity* in that faculty’s classes and discipline.

The greatest unknown is how these findings could impact the physical space—The Commons. What environmental conditions are necessary to provoke *intersubjective communication* in its multitude of variations, across the university community? It could require creating some completely different spaces, while also possibly requiring only slight modifications to other spaces. Will there be different adjacencies for the spaces? Who are the most-appropriate university partners to co-locate within the space? Finally, how can the space provoke the spirit of the Aspirational Library for all constituencies?

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The findings of the research suggest a fundamental shift, a realignment, according to the researcher, in the conceptualization of the library at a public research university. It is the first study of its kind. These two factors, alone, demand a replication of the research. Researchers need to engage other research methodologies to investigate this proposed essence of the library at a public research university. If *intersubjectivity* is the essence, as determined through this transcendental phenomenological research, then it should stand up to critical research regardless of method.

Further, as a unit within a broader organization, situated in a complex environment, it is critical that the same lens be applied to those broader areas. There needs to be phenomenological studies on higher education in the United States, and, subsequently, phenomenological studies on the public research university. Without getting to the complexity of these phenomena, most efforts will be as effective as “tilting at windmills.”

Further, as Moustakas (1994) stated regarding transcendental phenomenology, it is “a science of pure possibilities carried out with systematic concreteness and that precedes, and makes possible, the empirical sciences, the sciences of actualities” (p. 28). When validated, this research will make possible empirical research on how to operationalize these findings.

### **Recommendations for the Profession**

Beyond the recommendations for further study, these findings require considerable discussion within the profession. Librarians are experts in research and literature reviews, so they need to identify when the traditional purpose of the library—*to collect, preserve, and provide access to information*—was established and compare everything that has been developed afterwards to the traditional purpose and the proposed one.

For some, there will be no convincing; for others, this will align with their models; and for the last group will need to embrace the phenomenological mindset, using Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation, in order to intersubjectively communicate with this new information. Further, it is appropriate to reconsider current operations, strategic foci, research and assessment agendas, and communication efforts in light of this new information. Determine what functions logically flow from this purpose. (and, which do not). Find a way to say no, when needed, while empowering others to fulfill their purposes in light of this proposed realignment. Develop measures to assess effectiveness in furthering this purpose. Identify ways to communicate this with resource allocators.

Finally, the researcher acknowledges that much of what libraries already do is supportive of this purpose, but not necessarily aligned to this proposed purpose. There will be challenges, and all challenges should be met in the same, *intersubjective* manner. Partnerships and inter/intra-institutional collaboration will be even more critical. Build partnerships/relationships and work collectively.

### **Conclusions**

There is a strong need for libraries, in all of their aspects, perhaps this need in continually increasing. Concerns about “information overload” and people’s unwillingness to engage in meaningful, difficult conversations, are indications of increasing demand for someone to promote and facilitate *intersubjective communication*. As the researcher looks at the world at all levels from individuals to national entities, he sees little *intersubjectivity*. Too many people are focused on “facts” and “scientific” or “quantitative” data to know whether they’re even asking the right questions. Many people live in self-reinforcing protective bubbles, and the library needs to actively promote a re-grounding. Many people will not seek the library out, so the library

needs to lead this way of knowing into the broader community – focusing on the parent public research university, but also, through the library’s role in community engagement, the community-at-large.

The results from this research will be instrumental in informing the national conversation on the role of libraries at public research universities, both in general and at individual institutions. It can form the basis for decisions regarding roles of individual libraries. It can contribute to the ongoing dialog regarding expectations and how the current environment may be counterproductive to achieving those expectations.

By realigning the purpose of the library at a public research university from *collecting, preserving, and providing access to information to intersubjective communication*, the library can begin re-focusing on it’s true calling as servant leaders, and fulfill the greater needs of the university, which also include the collecting, preservation, and access to information.

The library is a phenomenon, not a building, not the people. It is an *EXPERIENCE*, one that never repeats, but continues to evolve with every intentional act.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Research questions:

1. What is the phenomenological essence of the library at a research university?
2. How does this essence align with current practice and theory?
3. What implications do these findings have on research universities and their libraries?

### **Undergraduate, Graduate, and Faculty Focus Group Questions:**

In thinking about the library, consider all locations, library personnel, and the online presence.

1. Thinking back to your first experience with the library, can you describe it?
2. What is your most prominent memory of the library? What was significant about the experience?
3. Please describe your most recent library experience.
4. Do you remember a time when you were frustrated by a library experience?
5. Can you recall a time when you were excited by a library experience?
6. Have you interacted with anyone who works in the library? Please share about that experience.

### **Library staff (FG), Interview Questions:**

1. Please describe an incident when you felt the most fulfilled as a librarian.
2. Please describe an incident when you felt the least fulfilled as a librarian.

### **Library director (I), Interview Questions (addresses this research question):**

1. Please describe an incident when you felt the most fulfilled as the library director.
2. Please describe an incident when you felt the least fulfilled as the library director.
3. Please describe an incident when you acted “as the library” with an undergraduate student.
4. Please describe an incident when you acted “as the library” with a graduate student.
5. Please describe an incident when you acted “as the library” with a faculty member.
6. Please describe an incident when you acted “as the library” with a university administrator.

### **CEO, CAO, CSAO, and CSAO Interview Questions:**

1. Please describe an incident in which you directly interacted with the library.
2. Please describe an incident in which you directly influenced the library.
3. Please describe an incident in which you and the library were involved.

**APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM****INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT****OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY****PROJECT TITLE: Constituents' Perspectives on the Role of the Library at a Public Research University****INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of the research project is Constituents' Perspectives on the Role of the Library at a Research University. The research will be conducted as part of the researcher's dissertation in Higher Education at Old Dominion University. The researcher is conducting focus groups and individual interviews of 9 different constituencies at each of three research universities.

**RESEARCHERS****Responsible Principal Investigator**

Dennis Gregory, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor  
Darden College of Education  
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

**Co-Investigator**

George J Fowler, MLS  
Graduate Student  
Darden College of Education  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

**DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

Many studies have been conducted, and many experts have provided their perspectives, on the role of the library at a public research university. None of the studies have investigated the perspective of representatives from all key constituencies at a public research university. This study will identify themes and statistically significant differences among the constituencies, through qualitative analyses of individual interviews and focus groups at three Carnegie-classified research universities.

If you decide to participate, you will join a study involving research on perspectives of the current and future role of a library at a public research university. If you say YES, then your participation will last for 30-60 minutes at your office. The other participants are Chief Executive Officers,

Chief Academic Officers, Chief Student Affairs Officers, Chief Research Officers, Heads of the Library, and samples of library staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students at this and two (2) other Carnegie-classified research universities.

### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

You should currently be a one of the following: Chief Executive Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Student Affairs Officer, Chief Research Officer, head of the library, faculty, graduate student, undergraduate student, or a member of the library staff at a Carnegie-classified public research university.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of knowing the researcher or frankly discussing negative perceptions of your current library, with which the researcher is familiar. The researcher will try to reduce these risks by removing all linking identifiers and restricting dissemination of the information. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is the opportunity to openly share your perspective regarding libraries at research universities, particularly your own. Others may benefit by relating your perspectives to their situation and applying the results of the study for the betterment of their research universities.

### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researcher is unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

### **NEW INFORMATION**

If the researcher finds new information during the study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then he will share it with you.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researcher will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as identity, interview recording, and interview transcripts, confidential. The researcher will keep any identifying information in a secure location. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

### **WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the researcher's institution, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

### **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other

compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dennis Gregory directly at 757-683-3702 or the Co-investigator, George J. Fowler at 757-683-4176. If you do not feel comfortable discussing the matter with the individual investigators, Dr. George Maihafer the current IRB chair at 757-683-4520 at Old Dominion University or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 will be glad to review the matter with you.

### **VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researcher has answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then Dennis Gregory at 757-683-3702 or the Co-investigator, George J. Fowler at 757-683-4176 should be able to answer them.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. George Maihafer, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-4520, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your records.

<b>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Witness' Printed Name &amp; Signature (if Applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>

### **INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<b>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
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## VITA

### George J. Fowler

Department of Study: Darden College of Education, Old Dominion University. 120  
Education Building, Norfolk, VA 23529

#### Experience

##### **Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia**

University Librarian	2015 – Present
Interim	2014 – 2015
Associate University Librarian for Information Resources and Technology	2011 – 2015

##### **University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas**

Head, Library Systems Department	2006 – 2011
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##### **Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Systems Librarian/Head, Enterprise Systems Unit	2002 – 2006
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##### **U.S. Army**

Commissioned Officer, Arkansas Army National Guard	2006 – 2009
Commissioned Officer, New Jersey Army National Guard	2002 – 2006

##### **Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida**

Electronic Services Manager	2000 – 2002
Reference Librarian	1998 – 2000

##### **U.S. Army**

Enlisted Soldier	1991 – 1995
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#### Education

Master of Science, Library Science, University of North Texas, 1998  
Bachelor of Science, Information Science, Cum Laude, University of North Texas, 1997  
Finance Officer Basic Course, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 2005  
Officer Candidate School, Army National Guard, Pennsylvania, 2004  
Russian Basic Course, Defense Language Institute, California, 1992