Empathy and Occupational Diversity - Guiding Forces for a Service Revolution at Kresge Library

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2010 U of M Essay Question

- "We know that diversity makes us a better university – better for learning, for teaching, and for conducting research."
  - - U-M President Mary Sue Coleman
- *Share an experience through which you have gained respect for intellectual, social, or cultural differences. Comment on how your personal experiences and achievements would contribute to the diversity of the University of Michigan.*

Presentation Outline

- Presentation Objectives
- About Kresge Library
- The Academic Library and its Service Model
- The Quasi-Academic-Special Library Environment
- Occupational Diversity
- Empathy
- Empathy v. Marketing
- Piecing it all together (Mini Cases)

Presentation Objectives

- Exploration of how a **diverse library staff can look beyond traditional obstacles**, especially in relationship to academic libraries
- Exploration of **empathy as a critical role of service entities**
- Exploration on how even **successful libraries should be continually reviewing their service offerings.**

Diversity and Empathy

Diversity

Empathy

About Understanding – not Pity

About Kresge Library

- Independent Library at University of Michigan
- Organizationally part of the Ross School of Business (3700 faculty, staff and students)
- Staff of 20 FT people (8 librarians, 12 staff) with 4.5 FTE of temporary staff
- Open 108 service hours a week.
- Provides focused support of faculty research and action-based learning programs (such as MAP).

About Kresge Library

> The library was honored for customer service in 2003 by the Business and Finance Division of the Special Libraries Association.

> Librarians had relatively little turnover before 2005.

> While the organization was an excellent service center, it was risk adverse – taking relatively few chances.

> Slowed down the pace of innovation.

Practices and Skill Sets for Diverse Librarians

> Academic Librarians
> Public Librarians
> Special/Corporate Librarians *(Strategic Knowledge Professionals)*

The Academic Library

- Basic Tenants of Service
- Access to resources – while possible through multiple sources and avenues – is controlled by the library.
- Mission focus is teaching people to use materials effectively.
- While we dabble in Patron-Driven purchases, we drive the growth of the collection.

The Academic Library

- Too often we look to our peer institutions – not to our community.
- We operate as a functional monopoly – even in the age of Google.
- These two aspects – taken together – can lead to stagnation.
- Little incentive to grow and expand, especially if you are near the top.

Corporate Library Hiring
and Desired Skill Sets

- Experience in industry or market and general library experience vs. experience in a corporate library
- Focus on teamwork, flexibility and SPEED – the position is part of the corporate community
- Positions are filled quickly – Use it or Lose it!
- Patron diversity – includes job functions (ie. Engineering, Marketing, etc.), and levels (executives, individual contributors, middle management, support staff)
- Focus on knowing the business and market, rather than specific databases and other resources, other library-specific skills
- "Corporate librarians are cooperative internally and competitive externally; academic librarians are competitive internally and cooperative externally" *(Survey response on the difference between the two cultures reported in: Cain, M. (2003). The two cultures? Librarians and technologists. Journal of Academic Librarianship, 29(3), 179-181)*

Public Library Hiring
and Desired Skill Sets

- Library experience vs. Public library experience
- Reference experience – in most public libraries the reference desk is open all hours that the library is open
- Diversity of patrons – the most diverse! Patrons from ages 0-100, varied ethnic backgrounds, educational level, language skills, (and all those YAs!)
- Generalist vs. Specialist – Large, urban libraries may have a "Business Specialist", who may also do regular reference shifts
- Traits and personality are often directly addressed in descriptions, "working with the public" and "ability to work with a wide range of clients", flexibility, patience
- Strong emphasis on community and patrons – May be a requirement to live in the city of the library, specific emphasis on working with children or young adults, elderly etc.

Academic Library Hiring and Required Skills

- Long, drawn-out search process, often resulting in excessively long periods of low staffing, loss of qualified candidates
- Job requirements (skills, experience and education) often represent hiring for existing skills, rather than traits and potential
- Academic experience (5 years, 10 years, etc.) is considered an indicator of success
- Experience with specific resources and databases, rather than experience in business planning, marketing, competitive intelligence, specific industry etc.
- Perception that the transition to academic from public or corporate library will be too difficult

The Quasi-Academic-Special Library Environment

- Many Academic Business Libraries balance between Special and Academic Libraries.
- Directors and librarians often have special library experience and background.
- Creation of a Service Ethos that looks to other solutions to provide an exceptional and unique.

Occupational Diversity

- Most commonly applied to four traits
  - Internal characteristics
    - Gender/Race/Sexual Orientation/Age
  - External characteristics
    - Cultural/Nationality/Religion/Marital Status
  - Personality characteristics
    - Traits/Skills/Abilities
  - Organizational characteristics
    - Position/Department/Job Status (prof./para-prof.)

Librarians at Kresge

- Many academic libraries hire people with academic library experience.
- Relative few cross-fertilization opportunities in academic libraries.
- Not the case at Kresge with recent hires (6 of 8 librarians hired 2005 or later).
- Diversity was not a predetermined goal – it was *allowed* to happened.

Librarians at Kresge

- 5 with Public Library Experience
- 3 with Special Library Experience
- 2 Only Academic
- 2 have MBAs
- 2 have library/information vendor experience
- All 8 had previous academic experience

Librarians at Kresge

- We are a combination of our actions and activities.
- Our training among different types of libraries actually help identify concepts and connections that we did not previously think about.
- This thinking allows us to more easily break down problems and potential solutions by have a diverse background.
- We are not only thinking along the lines of the academic libraries.

Librarians at Kresge

- › Diversity allows for different views and ideas when confronting a problem.
- › Provides different perspectives.
- › Allows us to consider solutions that are not native to academic libraries.
- › *Everyone participates in public services (think about the view across the 'reference desk').*

Empathy

- › Understanding the student body.
- › Understanding the different needs of the particular students.
- › Being flexible with deadlines.
- › Following the 'Golden Rule.'
- › How has diversity of backgrounds IMPROVED the Empathy for our users?

Empathy vs. Marketing

- Knowing your market is not empathy.
- Marketing addresses the broader group of students.
- Marketing targets the majority, not to everyone.

Empathy vs. Marketing

- Talking with students to find out what their needs are (without thinking about other libraries).
- Provided a forum and an opportunity to hear right from the students themselves.
- Rather than assuming what they want – we were able to ask very directly.

Empathy vs. Marketing

- Allowing for open discussions allows us to better understand our students and their needs.
- Occupational diversity leads to a more open group where we are not bound by Academic conventions and practices.
- Empathy is enhanced when everyone participates in public services.
- Take all requests and questions seriously!

Mini Cases

- Service enhancements and changes over the past three years.
- Some venturing into non-traditional library services.
- Examples of what we are doing at Kresge – and HOW we are working through the problems.
- Questions we asked:
  - Is this an information need?
  - Can we help?
  - What is the real cost?

Mini Case
Reference Desk Hours

- **Problem:** Part-Time MBAs need to change work schedule to get to the Library before 5pm
- **Pathway:** Discussions with both Part-Time MBAs and Day MBAs
- **Proposal:** Expand to 7pm Close on Monday – Thursday (had the ability to hire a temporary staff member to anchor this desk time and it provided outreach to Part-Time MBAs
- **Payoff:** Became very popular service desk time, among all Ross Students. X# of reference queries over first two years.

Mini Case
Faculty Scholarship Database

- **Problem:** No way to easily capture all scholarship created by Ross Faculty – especially for accreditation.
- **Pathway:** Working with the Assoc. Dean's on solutions – making sure that all stakeholder's needs are considered.
- **Proposal:** Create a system to use the library catalog as a way to capture and share this information.
- **Payoff:** Ongoing project – currently in proof of concept stages.

Mini Case
Expansion of Action Based Learning

➤ **Problem:** Ross School continually expands ABL programs into classes and other cohorts for MAP projects.

➤ **Pathway:** New programs sometimes contact us mid-stream.

➤ **Proposal:** Assign librarians on the fly to projects and teams if we do not know about it in advance.

➤ **Payoff:** Immediate student support and the ability to be connected for the following year of the program.

Mini Case
Students Asking for Old Syllabi

➤ **Problem:** Students wanted a way to look at old syllabi when selecting classes

➤ **Pathway:** Students talked about it in meetings with the Deans

➤ **Proposal:** Deans originally proposed an online space to view all these (CTools). We countered with a different solution that provides more flexibility and access to a wider audience (alumni)

➤ **Payoff:** Kresge Course Syllabi Archives

Mini Case
Part-Time MBA Course Pack Delivery

> **Problem:** We wanted to stop delivery service to Commerce Park Location (where many Part-Time MBA Classes were held).

> **Pathway:** Started a discussion with PT MBA staff about alternatives (they connected with students).

> **Proposal:** Instead of delivering to Commerce Park, we could ship to their home at no additional cost. Savings from delivery service fees would pay for UPS shipping to home.

> **Payoff:** All PT MBA students could have course packs delivered directly to their home at no additional cost – recognizing their difficult schedule.

Mini Case
Evening Printing Service for Faculty

> **Problem:** Faculty requested a means of having evening support for printing class handouts (to facilitate a just-in-time approach).

> **Pathway:** Learned through Faculty meetings with Chief Operating Officer

> **Proposal:** Create a mechanism where faculty can submit jobs and have them printed at Kresge Library by evening staff. The jobs would be limited in what could be done on the machines at the Library.

> **Payoff:** Not much – we have only had this used a few times in the past three years. We are not sure if this is a marketing issue OR mis-reading the demand.

Mini Case
The Devil Wears Prada

> **Problem:** 500 MBA1 students need to watch the Devil Wears Prada for MO 503 (Core Class)

> **Pathway:** Request from the faculty member for digital rights to have students download.

> **Proposal:** For cost and continued use – we opted to buy DVDs for each group.

> **Payoff:** We will be able to service this core class for as long as they are using this title.

Piecing it all together

> Empathy and Occupational Diversity were contributing factors in these changes.

> A willingness to see service opportunities, even in non-traditional library service areas.

> Break down issues into core components – not linking a problem immediately with a solution.

> Work through problems as a group.

Piecing it all together

> Understand the needs of the patrons/students.
> Do not discount those needs based on what others are doing.
> Create an environment that allows for a wide diversity of opinions to be expressed.
> A new culture where unconventional ideas and services can be advances and considered.
> Allow for Failure – not every idea is a good one.
> Allow a chance in culture to develop – NOT be imposed.

Piecing it all together

Management Perspectives
> Reward **innovation** – NOT success
> Understand the capacity for change among the library staff (think Rich Rodriguez or Lions with the West Coast Offense)
> Do not fear the **cost of success**.
> Quote Ms. Frizzle's often – "Take chances, make mistakes, and get messy!"

Questions

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