

Leading from Unexpected Places through Collaboration: Undergraduate Libraries in the Research University

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Introduction

Perhaps not immediately considered the crown jewels of our collections-rich and research-focused university library systems, undergraduate libraries are well-positioned to grow in importance moving forward, as large universities are challenged to deepen their commitment to holistic undergraduate student support, through academics, extracurriculars, and service, and all at scale. The undergraduate library's historic focus on teaching, learning spaces, and community enables an ideal setting to experiment with collaborative partnerships that cut across departmental divisions. By establishing and fostering a new normal of interdisciplinary, collaborative work that both inspires change among campus departments and models partnership for our users, undergraduate libraries and librarians can provide leadership for their institutions.

In discussing qualities of future leaders in academic libraries, Wilson (2015) states that, "Successful leaders invest in continuously assessing the landscape, engaging with constituencies, tracking patterns, and looking for places where libraries can make a difference in connecting people with knowledge" (106). She also identifies empowering collaboration as one of the key fundamentals of leadership:

The most important factor in successful collaborations is human relationships. The biggest investment will not be in hardware or in software, but in people... sustaining a culture of collaboration requires leaders who create enabling support structures (105).

Put in other terms, library leaders must have an awareness of the worlds they inhabit through regular environmental scanning, both inside and outside our institutions; and then find ways that they can contribute to the success of users through investments in their greatest assets, a user-focused staff and the collaborative relationships they foster.

The potential of library leadership through collaborative models is especially powerful and relevant in our undergraduate libraries and learning commons. Using key examples from our work at the Odegaard Undergraduate Library of the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle, we will explore leading from this unexpected place to build collaborative services and programs with lasting and catalyzing impacts. In so doing we will make the case for these types of collaborations and their importance in the future of the undergraduate-serving library's roles within academic institutions, showing they are teaching and learning environments that can benefit the institution at all levels.

History and Review of Literature

Arguably a product of necessity, when a major increase in post-War undergraduates caused a swell of populations onto campuses from the 1950s through the 70s, undergraduate libraries were constructed to be centers for undergraduate students to engage with library materials, staff, and spaces that encouraged learning and experimentation in ways rarely before considered in university libraries. Rather than places constructed to house vast research collections, these service-oriented facilities sometimes took the form of newly-constructed buildings, sometimes as collections and areas within main libraries, and sometimes as renovations of existing buildings. Over the decades, numerous academic librarians with experience in undergraduate (or undergraduate-serving) libraries have argued over successes and failures of undergraduate libraries and their missions, services, and spaces, and offered views on the importance of these libraries in serving institutional needs (Lundy, Dix, and Wagman 1955; Wagman 1959; Mills 1968; Burke 1970; Wilkinson 1971; Person 1982; Stoffle 1990; Watson, Foote, and Person 1996; TerHaar et al 2000; Sutton 2000). Although these authors agree and disagree on various points, a common thread that runs through their writing is that the formation of undergraduate libraries required librarians to think about services to undergraduates in new ways, pushed the envelope of what could (and should) be expected from academic libraries, and resulted in new areas of expertise in libraries' teaching and learning that supplemented collections and stewardship roles. One could argue that library instruction of various modalities, as well as the later conceptions of the computing and learning commons, were products of this undergraduate library movement.

Undergraduate libraries have also long been facilities open to the idea of new services and partnerships, which have taken several forms over the years. Much has been written about the value of partnerships within the academic library setting generally, but McKinstry (2004) considered partnerships in the undergraduate library setting specifically, citing the library's strengths in being "respected for its honesty, strong sense of responsibility, responsiveness to

the entire campus, and expertise in running big operations” (145). She also states that “undergraduate libraries are often seen as pioneers of change on campus, and are open to innovations that address demonstrated needs of the student” (McKinstry and McCracken 2002, 392). More recent articles (Love and Edwards 2009, Besara and Kinsley 2011) have looked at academic libraries and partnerships in terms of establishing frameworks for collaborations with campus student services partners and using assessments of student needs to establish partnerships that enable student success, and both articles begin to explore the value of supporting students more holistically. Offering some words of caution, Houston (2015) points out the need for libraries to consider partnerships carefully, in the context of defined organizational priorities; she argues that services like tutoring or career services “may be excellent services to co-locate in the library for the convenience of students, but they should be designed to offer collaborative opportunities with the information and research services so that they are integrated with the library’s core purpose, not disconnected from it” (86). Finally, an important recent article models a “how to” for libraries to use assessments throughout the lifespan of partnerships, to determine utility and fit; the authors sum up the feelings of many by stating that “in the current academic and fiscal environment, libraries can no longer undertake major new projects, or even maintain existing infrastructure, without considering partnering with other institutions” (Koltay et al 2016, 62).

Odegaard Undergraduate Library: A Renovation Enables Two Important Collaborations

In reading through a history of both undergraduate libraries and libraries’ partnerships, one discovers that the undergraduate library is a natural place for collaboration to thrive. Indeed, we argue that the current undergraduate library is a living laboratory of sorts, one that should assume a leadership role on campus through its collaborations. As undergraduate education has shifted over time, and as lessons experienced in the classroom are tied more explicitly to activities outside of the classroom, measures of student success include the ability to collaborate to solve problems in real-world settings -- thus, much like the current undergraduate library, the world outside the classroom becomes a student’s life laboratory. It is the expectation now, more than ever, that successful college graduates will have the ability to see across disciplinary lines and find value in combining strengths, learning together, and creating results better than the sum of the parts. Similarly, that is what we aim to do through collaborative partnerships in Odegaard Undergraduate Library. It is imperative that we use our position (as trusted, respected service providers at the university) to experiment with interdisciplinary teams and structures -- and through this experimentation we teach, model, and continue to learn ourselves.

Odegaard was a newly-constructed building that opened in 1972, well into the undergraduate library era, so established patterns of spaces, services, and collections existed as models. A popular destination on campus despite the decades of wear on the physical facility, the building was greatly showing its age by 2010 when a Provost-commissioned report boldly re-envisioned what could become of Odegaard, firmly establishing its position as a center for undergraduate learning in the heart of campus. Quickly following was the approval of a major renovation of several floors of the building, funded largely by the State of Washington and completed during the 2012-13 academic year. This renovation enabled the Libraries to work with stakeholders and partners to envision and create formal and informal learning spaces that have transformed the user experience in the building.

We will now take a closer look at two of these learning spaces that have fostered deeper collaboration among Odegaard staff and partners, specifically the Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs) and the Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC).

Odegaard Library Active Learning Classrooms

The addition of two state-of-the-art Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs) to the newly renovated Odegaard Library afforded an opportunity for the library to take on a leadership role at the UW in the areas of innovative classroom design and active learning pedagogy. Given its central campus location and its history of supporting students and instructors with their research, teaching, and learning, Odegaard was an ideal location for the new classrooms. From their inception, the ALCs were designed collaboratively, bringing together project architects and Odegaard staff; teaching, technology, and classroom support units; and teaching faculty.

The ALCs were designed to promote student-centered pedagogy and encourage students to build on prior understanding to solve problems and critically evaluate solutions in a peer group setting. Many academic departments at the UW had fully embraced problem-based learning and active learning pedagogy, but found their teaching somewhat constrained by inflexible, lecture-style classrooms. The ALCs were, therefore, well-positioned to tap into an energetic active learning pedagogy culture on campus. The two Odegaard ALCs accommodate classes of 90 and 63 students, featuring round tables that seat nine students each and include moveable chairs; flat-panel display monitors; ports to connect student devices to the monitors; numerous writable surfaces; and an instructor podium with a variety of technology available. The ALCs also feature sliding glass walls that are opened when classes are not in session, enabling them to serve as student study spaces in the 24-hour facility.

Active Learning Classrooms: Research Collaborations

As the first classrooms of their kind on the UW campus, the Odegaard ALCs presented a unique opportunity for research. Rigorous studies have been conducted by the University of Minnesota that demonstrate the value of ALCs in fostering high levels of student engagement (Baepler and Walker 2014; Brooks 2012; Brooks 2011; Walker, Brooks, and Baepler 2011; Whiteside, Brooks, and Walker 2010). These studies found that teaching in an ALC contributed significantly to student learning outcomes and to students' positive perceptions of their learning experiences. A study by Freeman et al (2014) proved that instructor use of active learning raised average student exam grades by half a letter, while student failure rates were 55% higher under traditional lecturing. Academic libraries are also increasingly transforming their traditional classroom teaching spaces into active learning classrooms (Kelly et al 2015; Soderdahl 2011).

Just as cross-unit partnerships are critical to the ongoing operational success of the ALCs, so too was the formation of collaborative research partnerships. The ALC assessment team included librarians, researchers and graduate students from Odegaard Library and two UW Information Technology (UW-IT) units. The team committed to a two-year research project with two librarians and a research scientist serving as lead researchers. Taking a team approach to assessment brought together different skill sets and perspectives, enriching the overall research and fostering community across UW departments. Instructors teaching in the ALCs were also essential collaborators throughout the assessment process, and they were included from the beginning stages of our research. More details on the ALC features and specifications, guiding research questions, and research methodology, in addition to research results and discussion, can be found in the team's two research reports (Fournier, Hornby, and Richards 2014; Fournier, Hornby, and Richards 2015).

Year One (2013-14)

The Odegaard Library ALCs included many of the technological features of other active learning classrooms nation-wide, but our research team was curious to learn how and to what extent these features would be used and valued by UW instructors and students. In our first year of assessment of the ALCs, we focused on understanding what, if anything, needed to change to better meet the needs of instructors and students, and what we could do to improve teaching and learning experiences in the ALCs. The collaborative research team, comprised of librarians and UW-IT researchers, had several questions going into our first year of research, centered on instructor preparation to teach in an ALC, challenges and opportunities for teaching in the classroom, and student perceptions of learning in an ALC. To answer our research questions, the team used a mixed methods approach including in-class observations, instructor focus groups, and instructor and student surveys.

Year one of the ALCs research found that instructors and students reported greater engagement, participation, interaction with peers and with instructors. ALC instructors reported high levels of student interaction and engagement in their ALC classes, higher than they had observed when teaching their course in a traditional classroom. Instructors reported increased student participation in group and class discussions. Our research also revealed that some features of the classrooms were valued more highly than others, with round tables, moveable chairs and shared display monitors ranked highest by both instructors and students.

Odegaard Library and UW-IT staff collaborated to take action on several of the research findings, including adapting ALC operations based on instructor feedback, purchasing additional technology supplies for use by instructors and students, and clarifying and improving the classroom support framework. By sharing the first research report and the actions we had taken to improve the ALCs experience, we further solidified many ALC instructors' trust in the research team and Odegaard Library staff, ensuring their willingness to continue to collaborate with us.

Year Two (2014-15)

In year two of the ALC research, the research team -- led by the same Odegaard librarians and UW-IT research scientist -- sought to examine the social interactions that happen in the ALCs more closely and extend the University of Minnesota's research into "educational alliances" between instructors and students and in peer groups (Baepler and Walker 2014). We saw year two of our research as an opportunity to look closely at select undergraduate ALC courses and deepen our collaborative relationship with ALC instructors.

The ALC research team had a solid foundation in our mixed-methods approach, had established relationships with ALC instructors, and were eager to refine our research methods and focus with more depth on fewer ALC courses. We selected four ALC instructor participants from across disciplines to study: the instructors agreed to share their syllabus and lesson plans for the course; allowed us to observe in the classroom multiple times over the quarter; allowed us to gather data from students via a group discussion or end-of-quarter survey; and discussed the collected data with us in an interview (Fournier, Hornby and Richards 2015). Our initial findings reveal multiple best practices for active learning pedagogy, undergraduate student engagement, and peer group learning (Fournier, Hornby and Richards 2015). Responding to practical teaching needs raised by instructors during year one of our research, the librarians and UW-IT created four ALC research profiles, drawing on data from our second year of research, with a focus on teaching best practices (Fournier, Hornby, and Richards 2015).

Ongoing Leadership Roles in Active Learning, Learning Spaces, and Programming

During the two-year ALC research project, several unanticipated collaborations and uses of Odegaard Library spaces and services emerged. ALC instructors reported that, as a result of teaching in Odegaard, they encouraged their students to form study groups in Odegaard outside of class time; they often referred their students to the Odegaard Writing & Research Center and our technology help services; and even held course office hours in Odegaard. Odegaard learning spaces and undergraduate student support services were suddenly opened up to a whole new set of instructors (and many of their students) who were previously unaware of these resources.

ALC instructors also increasingly looked to Odegaard staff to help bring them together, to advise instructors on active learning teaching, and to give voice to the challenges and triumphs they experienced while teaching in the ALCs. As word about the ALC research project (and the ALCs, in general) spread, Odegaard librarians were in the position to be strong advocates for the adoption of active learning pedagogy across campus. We were also well-placed to collaborate with campus teaching and learning stakeholders on active learning initiatives. The ALC research project and on-the-ground experiences have even influenced new classroom design, campus-wide. Indeed, UW recently built two new active learning classrooms, with plans for more active learning classrooms in the future.

Seeing a need for an additional consistent, trusted voice to advocate for active learning conversations and spaces at UW, Odegaard Library collaborated with ALC instructors, the UW Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) and UW-IT to design and implement programming for faculty about the ALCs. The programming, designed by the lead librarian ALC researcher, includes:

- An annual “Active Learning Classroom Open House” program for faculty, featuring facilitated small group conversations on active learning pedagogy topics, including developing student teamwork and presentation skills, and fostering equitable student participation. ALC instructors from a variety of departments (Biology, Nutritional Sciences, English, Engineering, Art, etc.) volunteer to lead the faculty discussions. The program has resulted in rich active learning pedagogy discussions from faculty across campus and across disciplines, consultations with Odegaard staff and its partners, and increased interest in teaching in the ALCs from new instructors.
- Ongoing faculty workshops, co-sponsored by Odegaard partners CTL and UW-IT, share research-based active learning strategies from the ALC research, and the ways in which

these strategies are transforming student learning. The workshop includes experiences from ALC instructors from different departments, sharing their active learning pedagogy techniques. In true active learning style, the workshops engage participants in trying out these pedagogical techniques for themselves in small groups.

Further programming will be developed by Odegaard and partners as a part of ongoing UW faculty teaching workshops and as ALC teaching needs evolve.

A highly collaborative model was used in the design, implementation, research and programming of the Odegaard Library ALCs. The ongoing leadership role Odegaard has assumed in furthering active learning on campus was made possible through the collaborative spirit and engagement of active learning pedagogy practitioners at UW. Three years into the opening of the ALCs, Odegaard's leadership role in active learning classrooms has moved well beyond simply providing teaching spaces in the building. We are now actively contributing to the overall educational mission of the University and improving outcomes for undergraduate students, all as a result of collaborative, cross-divisional partnerships.

The Odegaard Writing and Research Center

While the ALCs are an example of a carefully-planned and heavily-researched collaboration, another collaboration has grown and changed organically over time: the Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC). Many flavors of collaborations between libraries and writing centers exist, particularly in undergraduate libraries, and Ferer (2012) did an admirable job of surveying a considerable body of literature on many of these relationships. Aware of many possibilities for collaboration, through the recent renovation of Odegaard we consciously aimed to create services unlike any that had existed before at the University of Washington. Working together with our project architects and our Writing Center colleagues employed by the College of Arts and Sciences, we created a shared service space that allows numerous simultaneous consultations and requires a blending of our work cultures and models. This space, the physical footprint of the OWRC, combines staff employed by the Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences in a learning environment that blurs false divisions between research and writing. Our joint belief is that research and writing are intertwined and iterative processes existing within ongoing academic conversations, and having them play out in a shared physical space promotes better support of the many needs that a student may have when they approach our staff.

The OWRC had its beginnings in the 2003-04 academic year, when Odegaard founded a small in-house writing center nearby to reference librarians. Within a year, a partnership blossomed with the College of Arts and Sciences to forge a collaboration that would expand upon the already-established traditions of university writing centers. Thus, for nearly a decade, some of the librarians in Odegaard have been involved in the administration of the OWRC, and a number of the research librarians have even been trained to serve as writing tutors, in addition to providing more traditional library research assistance. Over the years, Odegaard librarians have taken an active role in incorporating research training for the graduate and undergraduate tutors of the Writing Center, leading training sessions and workshops on both basic research skills and theoretical underpinnings of research, so that tutors are better prepared to work with clients' needs. While all of this growth and learning-in-practice was occurring over the years, the OWRC's staff employed by Arts and Sciences expanded rapidly to fill a growing campus demand for services -- a service begun with a few borrowed tutors paid through a grant grew rapidly to its present size of 60-70 tutors with a small professional leadership team. So a rich opportunity existed, provided both by great interest and energy on the part of the staff and by a great need for additional capacity.

The renovation completed in 2013 allowed Odegaard to re-think services and create physical structures that would enable the research and writing process to play out in a shared first-floor space that accommodates many concurrent consultations. Rather than simply locating the OWRC as a separate writing services tenant in the building, Odegaard utilized data about the research needs of our users to inform a decision to eliminate the walk-up reference desk service and positioned research assistance within the OWRC footprint. Now research questions are answered in the shared physical space where writing consultations are occurring -- and research and writing staff have freedom and increasing knowledge to directly incorporate the expertise of each other, regardless of their employing department, thus sharing their strengths and modeling a cross-departmental environment for users. The physical setting is grounded by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which lays out guiding principles for space co-habitation and baseline service agreements, but the MOU is simply a foundation upon which we are experimenting with new ways of doing business.

Lessons Learned from the OWRC

Libraries and writing centers can have very different cultures, particularly with different staffing and accompanying organization charts -- comparatively, libraries tend to have a higher

proportion of professionals to student assistants, while writing centers tend to have flatter organizational structures. These types of cultural differences present challenges in creating and sustaining any lasting collaboration. But we feel that this is an area where libraries can be leaders for our campuses, by sustaining an effort to work across differences to model excellence in service. We offer evidentiary lessons from our partnership, as examples of opportunities to lead changes and better serve our student clientele:

- A Consultation Model and Student Learning -- From our Writing Center partners, Odegaard has learned the value of a more conversation-based, consultative model of assistance, one that has transformed our research help and expands upon the traditional reference interview to allow the librarian to work as an information guide while enabling the student-clients to take ownership of their research skills. Writing decades ago, Farber bemoaned a lack of instruction in reference transactions as one of the shortcomings of librarian work in the undergraduate setting. He pointed out that, although a reference librarian may “glow under the admiration and gratitude” of a student when answering a question, “at that moment, the student was interested in finding out about something and was open to instruction;” and that the self-empowerment that comes with finding one’s own information via search strategies is “the process of education, and this is what college librarians should be engaged in” (Farber 2000, 67). This still-relevant critique motivates the model of research help in the OWRC -- we believe that our role is to teach research strategy and process, and we aim do so in a non-threatening, approachable environment open to all. At the same time, we learn from students by engaging in real dialogues about their work to better understand their needs, so even the physical orientation plays a role -- by situating our research services in a highly-visible and high-trafficked environment, and by offering our assistance at round tables enabling relaxed but engaged conversation groupings, we show students both that we are there for them and value their input in the process.
- Incorporating the ACRL Framework into Training -- In considering ways to have a stronger theoretical basis for our shared services in the OWRC learning environment, our librarians began to incorporate the new ACRL Framework for Information Literacy into training with new writing tutors in 2015. “The *Framework* emphasizes information literacy as a collaborative effort, not one that is bifurcated or separate from other academic pursuits” (Ariew 2014, 218), and it has provided a shared language for discussion and learning, particularly in looking at research and writing as iterative processes grounded in **inquiry**. The Framework defines inquiry as “a process that focuses on problems or questions in a discipline or between disciplines that are open or

unresolved,” one that “includes points of disagreement where debate and dialogue work to deepen the conversations,” “extends beyond the academic world to the community at large...and “may focus on personal, professional, or societal needs” (ACRL Framework). As a powerful concept, inquiry is common ground that governs the intertwined writing and research processes in the OWRC, and librarians are continuing to refine our approach to working with clients and colleagues within that underlying theoretical framework, most explicitly through introducing it during initial tutor trainings and holding ongoing professional development conversations.

The collaboration between the OWRC librarians and writing tutors has evolved over time, as we have learned from each other’s cultures and incorporated practical approaches and theory into our service delivery. As we move forward, we look to deepen our roles in focusing on the commonalities of our mission and values, increasingly working toward a Center that aids in the transformative learning for our students, as they learn to think of writing and research as intertwined, iterative processes of inquiry. In so doing, we will continue to demonstrate leadership to our campus constituencies -- through excellent services achieved by a combining of disciplines and working across cultural divisions, we model the very learning we hope students will achieve in our undergraduate environment. We will continue to lead across campus divisions, working together toward deeper collaboration across departmental boundaries.

On Leadership, Future Directions and Opportunities

Through this essay, we have argued that undergraduate libraries can exhibit unexpected leadership through collaborations across institutional divisions, particularly as we broadly support undergraduates whose measures of success include an ability to collaborate across disciplinary lines. Using the examples of the ALCs and the OWRC at Odegaard Undergraduate Library, which represent two differently-conceived and -executed partnerships, we have shown how undergraduate libraries can deliver innovations in learning spaces and services while modeling cross-divisional collaboration both for our users and campuses.

While the aforementioned collaborations are still growing and changing, we also are looking ahead to build new strategic partnerships on campus, to combine staffs’ expertise and produce results that are better than the sum of the parts. A few areas in which we hope to engage in cross-campus collaborations include:

- **Assessment**

Assessment is already a core principle of the UW Libraries; and ongoing Libraries-wide assessments occurred post-Odegaard renovation, enabling us to learn more about how students are using our spaces and new services (Hornby, Richards, and McKinstry 2015). Our culture of assessment aims to ask the right questions at the right time. This led to the two-year ALCs research project and its attendant collaborations, and we look forward to more formalized assessments of the OWRC services and partnership in the upcoming years.

We view our assessment practices as a part of our learning that will allow deeper collaboration across campus divisions. For example, during the 2015-16 academic year, we began to experiment with Design Thinking and are adding those methodologies to our regular assessment toolkit. In one project, we collaborated with existing partners across UW Libraries and First Year Programs to better understand the UW transfer student experience using Design Thinking, and, in the process, made new key contacts both in the Offices of Admissions and the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMAD). Based on our findings, we have experimented with pilot programming to reach transfer students to connect them with Libraries and UW resources in the 2016-17 academic year. We also have shared our data with our campus partners and will continue to foster those relationships. (For additional information about this Design Thinking project, see Belanger et al 2017.)

- **Collaborations with Learning Technologies and Center for Teaching and Learning**

The UW-IT division of Learning Technologies (physically housed in Odegaard) and the UW Center for Teaching and Learning are partners with whom we anticipate further collaborations regarding the ALCs and active learning pedagogy, as we look to deepen our commitment to ongoing support for undergraduate-teaching faculty. An additional emerging area that connects our three divisions and shows great promise is open education and open educational resources (OER). As we wrestle with various ideas of “open” in education and the right approaches for supporting UW students and faculty, the work of the Libraries’ OER Steering Committee (founded in the 2015-16 academic year, and which includes membership from all three divisions) may lead to rich collaborative opportunities in the intersections of information, technology, and pedagogy.

- **New Partnerships with Student Life and Student Support Offices**

In an essay that remains powerful decades after its publication, Stoffle (1990) challenged undergraduate libraries to use their “potential for becoming the model of the multicultural, pluralistic environment that will be both the society and the campus in the near future” to “have an impact on the education of all students” (47), adding that we “should offer help and leadership for the campus rather than waiting to be asked” (49). Although Odegaard’s librarians have long had relationships across the campus, we look to engage more collaboratively with various student life and support offices in the upcoming years. We established and hired a half-time First Year Experience Librarian position in 2014; and, building on the success of that role, we created and recently hired an Undergraduate Experience Librarian position, within whose portfolio are strengthening Libraries’ relationships with offices supporting both international and academically-underprepared students. We also anticipate working further with student wellness and multicultural departments, such as Health and Wellness and OMAD, as we look to foster a rich learning environment with deeper collaborations that bridge our R1 institution and support undergraduate students holistically.

Through these and other partnerships, Odegaard will strive to lead by example as we reach across divisions and departmental-cultural divides and work toward the common goal of attracting, retaining, and graduating undergraduate students who are prepared to tackle large problems through similar collaborative means.

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