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"The Pipeline: Teens & Young Adult Librarians on current behaviors & wants"
Summary of presentation for the Librarians Association of the University of California – Berkeley conference, *Student Library Users: Deliver what they need—the way they want it*, October 23, 2009. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/LAUC/2009conference/>

To prepare for our session, we surveyed 9th and 12th graders about their library experiences previously in both school and public libraries. The answers gave us a clear picture of the students as a whole.

9th graders have limited experience using school libraries for anything other than checking out books. Their expectations for grades 9 -12 already reflect their expanded awareness of services far beyond checkouts: using computers for research, word processing and typing, as a facility for studying, group work, completing projects, hanging out in a peaceful place, doing homework, using reference books, getting help, finding good books, improving reading comprehension, finding support as work gets harder, and our favorite “I could use a lot of help!”

They have high hopes for what they will learn before graduating including: gaining efficient study, search & research skills, developing a love of reading, learning more computer and technology abilities, getting better vocabularies, learning how a library works, a lot about everything; the hopeful students who would like us to help them be more organized and our most ambitious student who said: Everything I can!

Our 12th graders’ survey responses present a vivid contrast to the freshmen. Universally they admitted that in 9-11th grades they came to the library for checking out books, especially good YA titles, doing research in both books and electronic resources, using computers for research, internet access, and word processing/printing, as a place to study and do homework before and after school and during lunch, as a quiet place to read, with their classes and the surprisingly honest young man who said he came in as a 9th grader before he began making friends and ate his lunch while pretending to study.

During their senior year, the focus has shifted; fewer students expect to be using the school library. While many still plan to check out books, study and do homework, use the computers for typing and printing, we got many responses about doing research for college and little else. At the same time, students acknowledged how much help they have received from the teacher librarians. We mention this feedback specifically because it relates directly to our dual roles in being affective and effective.

Interestingly, those students who said in their surveys that they use the library and teacher librarians the least gave the most “yes” responses to the question that asked if they feel prepared for college level research. Those who gave more detailed specific answers to previous questions were more likely to answer that they needed more practice at various searching and study skills before college. Our sense is that those who feel most confident fall into two categories: those who truly are well-versed in the research techniques they’ve been using, and those who don’t know what they don’t know.

The paradox we have identified is the divide between our affective and effective roles. While the mission of a school library is to make students/staff effective users of ideas and information, teaching skills to make students independent learners takes time and teacher collaboration. Simply connecting patrons directly to the needed resource or information can be tempting, but does not contribute to the student's ability to be an independent researcher.

Our affective role involves helping the students feel welcome and comfortable to come in on their own. School libraries are often called the great equalizers, especially since they provide access to technology that many students do not have away from school. Students whose library experiences have been positive are more likely to return by themselves and be autonomous in completing their work.

However, to achieve our mission and give students information literacy skills to be lifelong learners, we must be effective in our outreach to teachers, identifying specific skills to embed in research assignments. Since Berkeley High is divided into small schools and programs, each operates somewhat on its own in the design of its curriculum. This does not allow us to reach all students in a particular grade level to teach skills universally.

Preparing students for college level research presents challenges in terms of having appropriate resources to use. California school libraries are funded lower than all other states, which means that having current print and electronic materials is beyond the financial reach of many school districts. For example, most students will not have been trained in the use of databases, since there is no state level purchase and few districts can afford them on their own.

While we are confident much of what our students hope to find in college and university libraries is already in place, we wanted to pass on their feedback. Since they are accustomed to being greeted and asked if they need help, they may not expect the more independent ability assumed in higher education. In addition, their lack of familiarity with more sophisticated resources, such as scholarly journals, may hinder their ability to locate needed information. Suggestions to help students make a successful transition to college include: clear signage, library maps, pathfinders for frequently researched topics displayed prominently, universal library orientation, highly publicized web sites with tutorials and training for staff at ref and circ counters to direct students to librarians who can serve their research needs. The sheer number of students may make it impossible for library staff to work with them directly. Collaborations with teachers and/or grad students who have freshman classes, to design appropriate orientations specific to particular campus libraries, can help reach more students.