



# Building Community in the Academic Library: A Retention Strategy

Laura Manley  
Marygrove College

# Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The study's primary purpose was to explore how commuter students build community within the academic library at Marygrove College. The study's secondary purpose was to model test McMillan's and Chavis's (1986) theoretical "Sense of Community" framework for use within the academic library.

# Rational

1. Commuter Students
2. Library Planning and Commuter Students
3. Retention
4. Library Planning and Retention

## Rational: Commuter Students

- ❖ Growing population (Complete College America, 2011)
- ❖ Face different challenges than residential students (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
  - ❖ Individual
  - ❖ Institution
- ❖ Different needs (Jacoby and Garland, 2004-2005)
- ❖ Limited time spent on campus (Leider, 1999)

# Rational: Libraries Planning & Commuter Students

- ❖ Few library science studies
- ❖ Most are concerned information commons concept of planning
- ❖ Literature has not addressed how students use these spaces
- ❖ Literature not explored the planning as a community building activity
- ❖ Information common literature redundant
- ❖ No longitudinal studies
- ❖ Lacks theoretical approach

# Rational: Retention

- ❖ Sense of belonging/higher rate of retention
- ❖ Relationships/past experiences inform decision to drop out (Spady, 1971)
- ❖ Social and academic worlds intertwined (Tinto, 1997)
- ❖ Relationships form both in and out of the classroom (Hurtado and Carter, 1997)

# Rational: Retention

Retaining a student is fundamental to the ability of an academic institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition is indicative of a failure on the part of an institution to achieve its purpose. For institutions that rely heavily on tuition and fees to support academic programs and services, including the library, student retention is critical (Mezik 2007, p. 561).

# Rational: Libraries and Retention

- ❖ Funding tied to performance (Fraser, McClure and Leachy, 2001)
- ❖ Contribution to retention
- ❖ Traditionally measures impact using in/put output measures (Bell, 2008)
- ❖ Qualitative research as an alternative

# Theoretical Framework

McMillan's and Chavis's (1986) "Sense of Community" framework

1. Membership
2. Influence
3. Integration and fulfillment of needs
4. Shared emotional connection

(McMillan and Chavis 1986, p. 9)

# Research Context

## Institution

- ❖ Research conducted within the library
- ❖ Small, private, liberal arts college
- ❖ Located in an urban setting
- ❖ Undergraduate Enrollment Fall 2013
- ❖ 1041 undergraduate students
- ❖ 89.4% commuters/10.5% residential
- ❖ 55.9% Traditional/44.1% non-traditional
- ❖ 75% female/25% male
- ❖ 73.2% African American/14.2 % white

# Research Questions

1. What are the patterns and processes that contribute to commuter students' formation of community?
  - a) What factors facilitate community building?
  - b) What factors impede community building?
2. What is the role of the library in facilitating or inhibiting these processes?

# Qualitative Research Methods

- ❖ Interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate naturally occurring phenomena (Van Maanen, 1979)
- ❖ Researcher primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009)
- ❖ Uses rich description to make meaning and get an understanding (Merriam, 2009)

# Data Collection Methods

- ❖ Focus Groups
- ❖ Unobtrusive Direct Observation
- ❖ Librarian/Practitioner Interviews

# Focus Groups

Why focus groups?

- ❖ Induce social interactions
- ❖ Ability to elicit wide range of feelings
- ❖ Generates large quantities of data
- ❖ Explore social discourse in ways not possible through interviews or observation

# Examples of Focus Group Questions

## **Membership**

- ❖ Tell me about a time where you could recognize most of the members in this community.
- ❖ Tell me about a time when fitting into this community was important to you.

## **Influence**

- ❖ Tell me about a time when you felt you had influence over what the community is like.
- ❖ Tell me about a time when there was a problem in the community and members of the community solved it.

## **Integration and Fulfillment of Needs**

- ❖ Tell me about a time when you had an important need met via another student while you were in the library.
- ❖ Tell me about a time when you felt as though you were able to share your problems with another student while in the library.

## **Shared Emotional Connection**

- ❖ Tell me about a time when it was important for you to be part of this community.
- ❖ Tell me about a time when you were aware that members cared for one another.

# Focus Groups

Conducted two focus groups

- ❖ Morning

- ❖ 15 participants (2 male, 13 female)
  - ❖ 3 Freshmen
  - ❖ 2 Sophomores
  - ❖ 4 Juniors
  - ❖ 6 Seniors

- ❖ Afternoon

- ❖ 14 participants (5 male, 9 female)
  - ❖ 4 Freshmen
  - ❖ 0 Sophomores
  - ❖ 5 Juniors
  - ❖ 5 Seniors

# Unobtrusive Direct Observations

Why unobtrusive direct observations?

- ❖ Used to study actual behavior rather than repeated behavior
- ❖ Safety
- ❖ non-disruptive - non-reactive – non-intrusive
- ❖ easy accessibility
- ❖ inexpensive
- ❖ good source of longitudinal data (Kellehear 1993, p. 7)

# Unobtrusive Direct Observations

One Hour Observations in High Traffic Areas

- ❖ Daniel Fisher Room
- ❖ Reference and Technology Commons
- ❖ Circulation Desk Area
- ❖ Student Technology Collaboration Center

# Librarian/Practitioner Interviews

Purpose of librarian interviews:

- ❖ Explain data from previous data collection methods
- ❖ Provide professional insight
- ❖ Solicit ideas

Interviews w/Two Librarians

- ❖ 6 months experience at research site
- ❖ 30 years experience at research site

# Data Analysis

- ❖ Ethnographic Summary
  - ❖ Systematic tallying of most important points
- ❖ Raw data condensed into predetermined categories or themes
  - ❖ Membership
  - ❖ Influence
  - ❖ Integration and fulfillment of needs
  - ❖ Shared emotional connection

# Patterns

## 1. Normative use of space & establishment of group norms/boundaries around these spaces

- ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Furniture placement
- ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Library policy
- ❖ Factor that Impedes: Furniture placement
- ❖ Factor that Impedes: Lack of Policy
- ❖ Element of Community: Membership and Influence

## 2. Peer-to-peer tutoring

- ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Intentionally seeking other students in library
- ❖ Element of Community: Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

## 4. Information sharing

- ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Students sharing physical artifacts
- ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Students sharing electronic based data
- ❖ Element of Community: Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

# Processes

1. Repeated exposure to one another
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates Share majors
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates Taken classes together
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates: See each other in library on regular basis
  - ❖ Element of Community: Share Emotional Connection
2. Receiving aid from library staff
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Compassion and care
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates: Willingness to help
  - ❖ Factor that Facilitates :Challenge students' to do more
  - ❖ Factor that Impedes: Perceived staff incompetence
  - ❖ Element of Community: Integration and Fulfillment of Needs and Shared Emotional Connection

# Role of the Library

## Space

- ❖ space for peer-to-peer tutoring
- ❖ space for students to share experiences
- ❖ space for students share information

## Resources

## Assistance

## Policy

# Conclusions

- ❖ McMillan and Chavis's (1986) "Sense of Community" framework is a viable lens in which to study the formation of community within the academic library.
- ❖ Results from all three data collection methods found that the four elements of community were present during Marygrove Library users' interactions in varying degrees.
- ❖ As a community building activity, there is a precarious balance between too much and too little socialization.
- ❖ The same processes that facilitate the building of community can also impede the process of community building.

# So What?

## Uses of Results

- ❖ Evidence as to library's value
- ❖ Inform the profession

# Further Research

- ❖ Used to inform/revise/hone future studies
  - ❖ Both qualitative and quantitative
  - ❖ Different populations
  - ❖ Different contexts

# References

- Bell, S. (2008). Keeping them enrolled: How academic libraries contribute to student retention. *Library Issues: Briefings for Faculty and Administrators*, 29(1). Retrieved from <http://www.libraryissues.com/sub/PDF2901Sep2008.pdf>
- Brown-Sica, M. (2012). Library spaces for urban, diverse commuter students: A participator action research project. *College and Research Libraries*, 73(3), 217-231.
- Chickering, A. (1974) *Commuting versus resident students: Overcoming educational inequities of living off campus*: San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Complete College America. (2011). Time is the enemy. Retrieved from [http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf).
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S.(2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

# References

- Fraser, B., McClure, C., and Leachy, E. (2001). Toward a framework for assessing library and institutional outcomes. *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 2(4), p. 505-528.
- Jacoby, B. & Garland, J. (2004-2005). Strategies for enhancing commuter student success. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 6(1), pp. 61-79.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70 (1), 342-345.
- Kellehear, A. (1993). *The unobtrusive researcher: A guide to methods*. Melbourne, AU: Allen & Unwin.
- Leider, S. (1999). Sexual minorities on community college campuses. ERIC (ED447841).
- McMillan, D. and Chavis, D. (1986) Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 4, 6-23.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

# References

- Mezick, E. (2007). Return of investment: Libraries and student retention. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(5). 561-566.
- Pickard, A. (2007). *Research methods in information*. London: Facet. *Processing and Management*, 35, 801-817.
- Spady, W. G. (1971). Dropouts from higher education: Toward an empirical model. *Interchange*, 2(3): 38-62.
- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. 81: 33-47.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of the recent literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1): 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 68(6), 599-623.
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). Reclaiming qualitative methods for organizational research: A preface. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 520-526.