

Reflective Essay #1:
The Shifting Roles of Public Libraries

One of the big questions I keep asking myself throughout this semester so far (my first semester in the program) is how are libraries changing, and how will they continue to change as technologies continue to evolve and play a major role in our everyday lives? I've decided to do my research paper on this topic, and I've decided to use these reflective essays to discuss some of my thoughts on the subject.

As usual, I have more questions than answers, and I am wondering if I will even find any satisfying answers as a result of my research. Some of the questions I have are: Is the physical library still viewed by community members as a relevant community service? How aware is the public of library services, and how does the public think these services are different now from what they are traditionally used to? Do people really think that libraries are not needed anymore? How can libraries better promote their services to the public? Is it safe to assume that future public libraries will have the look and feel of community centers that offer library services as well as all-around community services?

I know there are many different reasons people use the public library's services: free access to the Internet, to learn, for entertainment, to read, check out books, conduct research, share family time, to volunteer, to apply for a job, and many, many more reasons that are all valid and worthwhile. And what is amazing to me is that whenever I step foot in my local public library, it is always filled with people doing one or more of the activities I listed. So if someone were to ask me if I think the physical library is a relevant community service, I would say yes! And there are many reasons I would say yes, but the main reason is because I think public libraries provide the necessary tools that facilitate lifelong learning to those who would

otherwise not have them. There will always be a percentage of the population who does not have personal access to the Internet or a computer, and in my opinion, these tools are very necessary for learning in our information age. People who are financially well-off and who have access to computers in their homes may not place as much value on libraries as those who are less fortunate, so maybe transforming public libraries into community centers will connect more of the community with the library and provide a place for all community members to spend quality time with their families. I think the challenge will be how to connect to those who don't think they *need* the library's services and make them understand how the library's services can be relevant to their information needs (for instance during economic hard times like the one we are currently facing, I think people drift towards free services and services that are less damaging to tight budgets, but people can't do this if they aren't aware of the services).

What I think is most important to the future of libraries (but I can't even say future because as far as libraries are concerned, the future has arrived!) is how they will make the public aware of their services and how libraries are changing. Advertising on television is a great way to get the message across, and I think that libraries need to do more of this. Almost everyone I ask say that libraries need to advertise on television. Also, radio ads and billboards would be a great way to send the message of library services. My mother found out that the library offers free Internet access from a news report she saw on television. If it hadn't been for that report, she would still be in the dark about this particular service (or maybe not because I am sure I would have told her by now). And as I am finishing up my thoughts for this reflection, it is 6:50pm on Friday night and I am at the Marriott Hotel in San Jose as I attend the CLA conference. I attended my first workshop this morning called Leaders in Libraries: Masters of Change, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. One thing that I learned is that libraries *are* marketing and

advertising in unique ways more and more. One story is of the Louisville Free Public Library. This library had 30,254 Summer Reading Champions! The library figured out a way to congratulate each champion and promote the library at the same time through a low cost initiative. What the library did was send a yard sign that says “A Library Champion Lives Here” to each child who was involved in the Summer Reading Program. The families who received these signs were able to display them in their yards for the entire community to see. Some of the children even received congratulations cards in the mail from their neighbors. When I heard this story I thought: what a great way to get families and communities involved with the library, and what a great way to promote awareness! These are the things I am interested in learning more about and I am so glad I decided to attend the CLA conference this weekend (even though I have papers to write!!).