

**Mistakes Were Made: Strict Curricular Focus and
Student Retention in Academic Libraries**

Lindsey Reno, University of New Orleans

Abstract

In a world where libraries are searching for ways to justify their very existence, this article provides an argument toward one such justification. The author asserts that, by providing leisure materials to students, the academic library can help to improve rates of student success, thereby bolstering retention. Leisure reading has been shown to reduce stress, which is one of the many causes linked to students dropping out of school. It is also more likely that students will read this type of material if they are within close proximity of a leisure reading collection. Library use is linked with student success and it is possible that leisure reading could draw students to the library and make them feel more comfortable using it. Reading itself is also linked with academic success. This paper examines the cyclical relationship between leisure reading and student retention and argues that such reading materials should be part of a collection that provides holistic support to students and not merely curricular support.

Keywords: Leisure reading, recreational reading, academic libraries, student retention, literacy

Introduction

The current climate for academic libraries is one of struggle and adversity. Librarians are constantly being asked to provide proof that the library's very existence in an institution is necessary. At the same time, many colleges and universities struggle to retain students. To these administrators, the library may seem like dead weight. The library is typically a unit within the university that requires millions of dollars to operate, while periodically asking for more, and generating no funds of its own. This train of thought, at best, lacks forethought and insight into the student experience, and at worst, has the potential to cause detrimental educational consequences. It may be difficult for administrators to understand the positive effect that libraries can have on retention when there is no immediate payoff. One hears the phrase "return on investment" more and more in academia. Many librarians and library administrators seem to think that they can only provide this by strictly adhering to the curriculum. As a result, many libraries focus their collection development policies toward curricular support only.

Two characteristics of student life that are strongly associated with retention are academic success and student engagement. The academic library is uniquely positioned to provide a path to achievement in both of these areas. Its ability to provide both academic support and diversion are unduplicated on college campuses. Underestimated, however, is the academic library by college and university administrators and by many librarians. Due to funding constraints, it is impossible, at many institutions, to provide more than the bare minimum of materials. At some institutions, even the bare minimum is unachievable. For these reasons, the idea of providing leisure reading materials can seem, at times, absurd. Even so, operating with strict curriculum focus in academic

libraries would be a mistake.

Along with both standard and innovative services and materials that focus on the curricular and research needs of students, librarians should also strive to help students form positive associations with the library. All areas within an academic institution have a role to play in student retention and the library is particularly well suited to the task. Consider the idea that any library experience held by first-time college students would be in that of a public or high school library. These are libraries that hold, not only research materials, but also popular reading and viewing materials. Providing materials of the latter variety would help students form connections between the academic library and the libraries of their previous experiences. Having diverting materials in an academic library can help make it seem less intimidating for first year students and perhaps even help them form positive associations with the library and the institution as a whole.

Why Is Retention Important?

Low or declining retention rates can be a sign that something is wrong in an institution, but it also has a direct effect on funding for that institution. In recent years, college and university administrators have been putting a strong focus on increasing retention rates. This can be a difficult thing to achieve. Attempting to determine why a transient population is so, well, transient, is like trying to hit a moving target.

Steven Bell (2014) provides the hypothetical example of a small tuition-funded college of one thousand students or less. He asserts that even a loss of five to ten students could force the institution to cut staffing. Imagine that impact doubled or tripled at a larger institution. Cuts of this kind can seriously hamper a university's ability to provide services to students. Even a public state-funded institution, who receives that

state-funding in proportion to their enrollment numbers, would be seriously affected by a drop in retention of similar size.

According to current wisdom, there are a number of factors that contribute to a student discontinuing their education at any given institution. According to Bell (2014), one of the two top reasons that students leave college is poor academic performance (Bell, 2014). Another factor that contributes to retention, according to Haddow and Joseph (2010), is student engagement. They assert that the activities that a student engages in while they are in college are often more important than what and how they actually study (Haddow & Joseph, 2010).

The library is often overlooked as a place that would have any effect on retention, whether positive or negative. There is an argument to be made, however, that this is not the case. Librarians across the United States look at enrollment numbers each academic year and cringe at the inevitable cuts, but may feel powerless to stop it. The entirety of an institution is affected, in one way or another, by enrollment and retention of students. It is in the best interest of librarians to do whatever they can to help.

How Does the Library Fit In?

Student engagement is thought to have a correlation with retention. The library may help retain students by allowing them to make connections on campus. The library, no matter how many librarians and administrators would like to think otherwise, is no longer just a research and study space. Students socialize in the library. It is a place to see and be seen. A leisure reading collection, again, may be a draw for students to come to the library, but they may stay to socialize.

Part of student engagement may be found in stress reduction. A leisure reading

collection may be able to transform the library from a stressful place into one of relaxation, reflection, and pleasure. The library can act as a haven for students. They would be more likely to engage with librarians and with their fellow students, if they were relaxed. Stress, as indicated in the literature, is also a hindrance to academic success. Making the library a more comfortable place for students should be a high priority.

Leisure reading collections, and the reading rooms that housed them, used to be an established component in academic libraries. Julie Elliot (2007) writes about the history and decline of extracurricular reading in academic libraries in her article, “Academic Libraries and Extracurricular Reading Promotion.” During the first half of the twentieth century, recreational reading rooms in academic libraries were commonplace. During the 1960s, these collections started to decline for various reasons, but they seem to have declined as funding did. It is difficult to determine which came first, a downturn in reading by college students or a lack in the availability of materials. The author points to a number of theses written that show the dwindling of leisure reading in academia. Elliot also notes that there may have been an attitude or elitism, and possibly even censorship, when librarians made recommendations for leisure reading materials. This is evidenced by some articles written during this time period, exhibiting opinions about particular works (Elliot, 2007). Could there be a connection between the loss of these collections, and problems with retention in higher education?

The library can be a stressful place for students. The arcane and labyrinthine processes and structure, coupled with the anxieties that go along with academic performance and, let’s face it, procrastination, can make the library a difficult place to

navigate. Stress has been identified as a major barrier to academic success. What can librarians do to make the library a less stressful place? A leisure reading collection can make the library seem less intimidating and make the students feel more at home. The stress reduction that can occur when leisure reading materials are present is two-fold: 1. the presence of materials makes students more comfortable and reduces the negative feelings that they have about the place itself and 2. using the materials is a stress reducer in itself.

Connie Van Fleet (2003) writes that “Popular fiction may entertain and amuse, excite the imagination, reduce mental and physical stress, give a sense of order or control, validate ideas or emotions, or meet social needs of belonging or understanding” (p. 68). David R. Earnest and William O. Dwyer argue that there is a direct connection between stress and students who withdraw from college. They write that much of the problem comes from students’ attempt to avoid stress in a potentially destructive way by, simply avoiding stressors. The stressors, in this case, are exams and papers (Earnest & Dwyer, 2010). Recreational reading, while technically still an avoidance measure, would reduce stress while still bringing students into the library where they can potentially get help with their academic work. Jeannette Woodward (2009) argues that:

Academic libraries often find that popular fiction doesn’t quite fit into their policies and procedures, so they may tend to avoid it. Yet such collections are often the most heavily used in the library, improving circulation statistics and making students feel at home.

Increasing students’ level of comfort in the library is essential in making them regular library users and, thus, increasing the likelihood of their academic success.

Library use, regardless of the presence of a leisure reading collection or the lack thereof, is associated with stronger academic success. It is possible to use a leisure reading collection as a “hook” to get students into the library. Popular culture can be a strong “lure” to get students and other users into the library (Dewan, 2010). Even if one is merely using a leisure reading collection to lure users to library, there is something to be said for just getting students in the door. According to Haddow and Joseph, library use alone is a marker of retention in colleges and universities. Their study, published in 2010 in “Loans, Logins, and Lasting the Course: Academic Library Use and Student Retention,” the authors show that library use, particularly within the first few weeks of a student’s first semester, is associated with retention. The authors gathered library use data on a cohort of commencing students over the course of one semester. They looked at loans of library materials and logins at library work stations. Students who were retained, surpassed the withdrawn students in every measure (Haddow & Joseph 238). Lewis and Wickoff, in their 2008 presentation at the Canadian Library Association Conference titled “Making Room for Ludlum: Popular Fiction Collections in Academic Libraries,” lament the lack of leisure reading materials in academic libraries. They describe the current attitude among librarians about leisure reading as one of disdain.

Some librarians think that popular fiction is trivial and that the expense of these materials is unjustifiable. They find that the transitory nature of paperbacks is just “too much trouble” and that the primary role of the academic library should be information-seeking. They go on to describe the growing research that refutes these assumptions. They assert that leisure reading can be an important tool for personal growth and lifelong learning and that academic libraries should encourage the love of reading in college

students, who are at a critical point in their academic lives (Lewis & Wyckoff, 2008). Bosman, Glover, and Prince report on an initiative that was undertaken at the James Branch Cabell Library at Virginia Commonwealth University to implement a series of recreational reading services in 2005. They assert that “literacy outreach services promote and strengthen lifelong learning and student engagement” (Bosman, Glover, & Prince, 2008, p. 47). They implemented a book recommendations blog, a book swap, participation in a city-wide and university reading programs, displays, and browsing collections. They did this because they wanted the students to think about the library in a new way. They write:

...for many students the library represents stress, anxiety, and deadlines.

Creating spaces and services both within the library walls and online to promote leisure and relaxation is one way to overcome the perception that the library is a stressful place. (Bosman, Glover, & Prince, 2008, p. 47)

Librarians might also consider opening up the library to other non-research activities as a way of reducing the stress that the library can sometimes inspire. Such activities include coloring, gaming, film viewings, and book club discussions.

Reading Is Fundamental

A literature review reveals that it is a well-established concept that reading is linked with academic success, at all ages. Academic success is a major contributor to student retention. This connection should be a no-brainer for university administrators. Leisure reading should be encouraged in college students. There is often a major aptitude gap between high school and college. Many students lack the reading skills to absorb, retain, and analyze a scholarly article. It would stand to reason, then, that improvement

of the reading skills of first-time college freshman would be a major boon to the retention effort. Leisure reading collections in academic libraries can go a long way toward bolstering this effort. Reading “fun” books can help students improve reading skills and learn how to read more complex and difficult texts. Leisure reading is also associated with better cognitive function and improved writing. Reading strengthens life-long learning. It has also been shown to improve writing, reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar (Kelly, n.d.).

What is more, according to Latty Goodwin (1996), professors often complain that students do not complete assigned readings. It is also purported, by the media and many educators, that many first-time college students are unprepared for college. Goodwin asserts that this is not due to illiteracy, but aliteracy. In other words, students can read, but they do not (Goodwin, 1996). This is one reason, among many, why librarians should collect recreational reading materials and promote them to students.

Bosman, Glover, and Prince (2008) report that it may be possible to reverse aliteracy in college age adults. They synthesized a number of studies that indicated an ebb and flow to one’s interest in reading throughout life. One’s desire to read, according to studies, seems to increase with encouragement and availability of materials. One’s interest in reading is often lost during junior high school period but can be renewed later on in life (Bosman, Glover, & Prince, 2008). Academic libraries should encourage this interest in reading as a means to academic success and, by proxy, retention.

One possible problem, according to MacMillan and Rosenblatt (2015), is that first-year college students just do not have the ability to read the scholarly material that faculty expect them to work with. They assert that students prefer free online sources,

such as Wikipedia, simply because they can read them. There is a big difference between the difficulty of the texts that students are expected to read in high school and those at the college level (MacMillan & Rosenblatt, 2015).

Bernice Cullinan reported on a study done by Feitelson and Goldstein in 1986 that found that light reading produced motivation to do more reading. They also discovered that students who read books in a series developed the competency to read higher quality material (Cullinan, 2000). Therefore, reading something like the Harry Potter series could allow students to start to read more complex material, such as the aforementioned scholarly texts. Cullinan (2000) also wrote about the idea that comic books, even more so than other leisure reading materials, led students to want to read more. The more a student reads, the better their reading skills become. The book *Reading Matters: What the Research Reveals about Reading, Libraries, and Community* quotes George Watson Cole, speaking at the Lake Placid Conference of 1894, quoting one of his contemporaries, F.B. Perkins as saying:

‘Readers improve; if it were not so, reading would not be a particularly useful practice.’ Readers ‘who begin with dime novels and story weeklies may be expected to grow into a liking for a better sort of stories, then for the truer narratives of travels, of biography and history, then for essays and popular science, and so on upward.’ (Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006)

A pilot project at the University of Cincinnati mirroring Henry’s approach showed students improve their reading skills on the standardized test, Degrees of Reading Power. Their scores went from a 26.13 to an average of 45.81 out of a possible score of 70.

Paulson writes that “the more you read, the better reader you become” (Paulson, 2006, p. 56).

Barbara MacAdam (1995) asserts that language, both reading and writing, has a strong role in critical reasoning skills and higher order reasoning skills. She writes that the literature reveals many an argument for the use of reading in the development of critical thinking skills and that

Finally, we get a glimpse of one apparently unique possibility why reading and writing are such powerful factors or tools in critical reasoning. That power is the ability of narrative structure—stories—to construct unifying conceptual frameworks that organize concepts ‘clustering’ the information in a given cognitive domain and thereby making it manageable.

(MacAdam, 1995, p. 243)

She further explains that narration is attractive to our natural sense of how to structure data. Reading energizes those who engage in it while, at the same time, providing an example of a logical structure, organization, and the connection of elements. She goes on to write that “Stories are still an extraordinarily powerful way to organize what would otherwise be isolated bits of information (data); and more, they convey ideas and feelings that actually convey more truth than just the information (more real meaning)”

(MacAdam, 1995, p. 250). She also explains that independent reading has a roll in teaching students “to learn how to learn” (MacAdam, 1995, p.250). Learning how to use books is an important and integral part of the educational process. So much of what students learn in college is self-taught (MacAdam, 1995).

As Roth (1999) explains, “A well written literary tale unfolds from a problem and

leads to the critical thinking skills of planning, decision making, reflecting, and evaluating. Critical reading actively involves the participant in many levels of thinking, beginning with anticipation, forecasting, and inquiry and continuing through the problem-solving processes” (Roth, 1999).

MacAdam (1995) reports on a study reviewing current research done by Farley and Elmore in 1992 that looked at the relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, vocabulary, and cognitive ability in underachieving first-year college students. Their research showed that reading is a process of construction. The reader creates their own meaning through the interaction of themselves with the text, context, and their own knowledge and experiences. Reading comprehension is thought to depend upon this process. The research reported that students with less verbal ability were able to identify words and facts, but were not able to form the above interaction. They were also unable to integrate ideas or draw logical conclusions. MacAdam (1995) concludes, “College students were found lacking in deductive and inductive reasoning, the ability to infer, to recognize assumptions and evaluate conclusions. Thus, reading comprehension was directly linked with a variety of cognitive or critical thinking abilities” (MacAdam 1995).

McElroy (1986) asserts that a student’s extra-curricular reading is as important as the reading done in the course of class assignments. He suggests that the two must be in balance if academic progress is to be made and that faculty should allow students to incorporate their concurrent leisure reading into coursework. He reiterates the sentiments of other authors in the literature, in that he highlights the connection between reading and critical thinking. He explains that motivation is an important factor in the building of

reasoning skills through voluntary reading. He writes, “What does the student need/wish to be able to do? How can the perhaps reluctant or non-habitual reader be brought into comfortable and fruitful contact with problems of information retrieval, study, synthesis, and representation?” (McElroy, 1986, p. 55).

Stephen Krashen (2004) writes in his book *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research* that free and voluntary reading is “the only way to develop adequate levels of reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling” (p. 57).

While Krashen’s research focuses on the reading habits of children and adolescents, it is applicable to all ages, and is widely cited in the literature focusing on recreational reading and libraries. Krashen addresses reading as a means to vocabulary acquisition by reporting on *The Clockwork Orange Study* (Saragi, Nation, & Meister 1978). Subjects were asked to read copies of *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess that lacked the glossary of *Nadsat* words that is typically present in the back of mass produced copies. Participants finished the book in three days or less and learned at least forty-five words each. Test scores ranged from fifty to ninety-six percent, with an average of seventy-six percent (Krashen 2004). This shows how much vocabulary one can learn by reading a single novel, thereby increasing one’s own reading and writing skills.

Jude Gallik (1999) looked into the relationship between recreational reading and academic achievement in 1999. Her literature review points to the well-established connection between reading and vocabulary, spelling ability, reading comprehension, grammatical development, and writing style improvement. Over and over again, independent reading is associated with reading achievement among students. Gallik administered 151 surveys to students in four sections of first-year composition and three

upper-level writing classes in a private liberal arts college in Texas. Students were asked, among other things, about their GPA's and how much time they spent in recreational reading, both during the semester and during breaks. The students were also asked about what types of materials they read. She found a weak, but statistically significant, correlation between cumulative grade point average and time spent in leisure reading during semester breaks (Gallik, 1999).

In his article "Self-Selected Reading for Enjoyment as a College Developmental Reading Approach," Eric J. Paulson (2006) writes about the use of self-selected reading in college-level developmental reading courses. He asserts that having developmental reading students engage in voluntary leisure reading is pivotal in academic success and can lead to a love of reading. He reports:

Studies showing that reading enhances literacy development lead to what should be an uncontroversial conclusion: Reading is good for you. The research, however, supports a stronger conclusion: Reading is the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good spellers. (Paulson, 2006, p.53)

Paulson (2006) also describes the self-selected reading approach in second-language acquisition. Studies found that voluntary reading in this context increases reading speed and comprehension, increases scores on standardized tests, has a positive effect on students' writing skills, builds confidence in reading, increases vocabulary, and increases motivation to read (Paulson, 2006). This has implications at all reading levels. Paulson (2006) reports that the few empirical studies done on self-selected reading and its effect

on reading skills show vast improvement on standardized reading measures. He writes about a study done by Jeanne Henry, published in 1995. Henry had her students engage in self-directed fiction reading for one semester and write literary letters to each other and to the instructor about what they were reading. Henry reported that the students showed an increased desire to read. They also increased their reading levels by 3.6 grade levels during the semester. Their reading skills were measured by the Nelson-Denny reading assessment (as cited in Paulson, 2006, p. 54).

Dewan (2010) points to the research that indicates that people remember facts more readily if they are stored in our minds as narrative. In fact, memories that are not stored as narrative can be lost. She also argues that stories are shaped in such a way as to be attractive to the mind and that this is why they hold memories (Dewan, 2010).

Why the Academic Library?

While the connection between leisure reading and academic achievement is strong, it may not be obvious why these materials should be housed in an academic library. One well-used argument against the idea of leisure reading collections in academic libraries is that students can go to the public library. It may be difficult for well-educated librarians and administrators to put themselves into a student's shoes again, so they may not understand the logistical issues that some students face. Students may have a difficult time getting to the public library or may simply turn to other activities if books are not readily available. The literature shows that it is important for these materials to be highly accessible, if they are to have any impact on students' reading behaviors and on their perceptions of the library.

Paulson (2006) states that "...a public library a bus ride away seems accessible on

paper, but in practical terms is not used as often as a source of books immediately accessible” (p. 55). Goodwin (1996) reported on the reading habits of college students in her paper, “Aliteracy Among College Students.” She interviewed a number of students about their reading activities and wrote that availability of materials was described as a problem by many interviewees. She wrote that students were “...not inclined to go out of their way to read” (Goodwin, 1996, p.14).

Julie Elliott (2007) conducted interviews with a number of librarians for her article, “Academic Libraries and Extracurricular Reading Promotion.” Some librarians reported that public libraries were too far a distance away from their institutions for students to reasonably travel. Some public libraries would not actually issue library cards to college students. One of the librarians wrote, “The bottom line is that students are going to use what is convenient for them and if we’re not providing the service, they will do other things (go watch TV) or go elsewhere (Barnes and Noble)” (Elliott, 2007, p.40).

So known is the vital need for leisure reading materials, that some academic departments have actually bypassed the library and taken matters into their own hands by starting internal lending libraries. Faculty members at the University of Cincinnati Center for Access and Transition recognized the need for these reading materials to be readily available to such an extent that they got a grant to create a departmental fiction lending library (Paulson, 2006). Krashen (2004) writes that:

The most obvious step is to provide access to books. It is certainly true that ‘you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.’ But first we must make sure the water is there. The research supports the commonsense view that when books are readily available, when the print

environment is rich, more reading is done. (p. 57)

He reports that as access to books increases and the quantity of books increases, so does reading. Students also check more books out of libraries that have more books and that stay open later. His research also shows that where there are both access to books and free voluntary reading, literacy development increases. Krashen (2004) also notes that there is a positive correlation between quantity and richness of reading material and literacy development.

In *Reading Matters*, the authors assert that librarians should bear in mind the importance of accessibility. The presence of books is a major predictor of reading, along with education level (Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer 2006).

Dewan (2010) writes that:

By creating a popular reading collection within the campus boundaries, librarians will increase the likelihood that students will turn to reading as a pleasurable activity, one that will educate their minds, stimulate their imaginations, and inspire their spirits while simultaneously fostering the communication and critical skills they need to succeed in school and the world beyond.

Bosman, Glover, and Prince (2008) also reiterate the need for leisure reading materials to be on campus because students cannot find the time to leave campus to go to the public library, or they simply find it too difficult. They conclude:

A student's level of comfort and familiarity with the library is a factor that we consider critical to academic success. Therefore, it is useful to position the library as a place not only to study and conduct research, but also as a

place to relax and enjoy leisure reading. (Bosman, Glover, & Prince, 2008, p. 56)

Another librarian interviewed by Elliot (2007) wrote:

I also know for a fact that in an age of tight budgets and ever-increasing journal subscriptions, it can be tough to defend spending money on paperbacks that aren't shelf hardy and don't contribute directly to course content. But if that student sitting in the third row is more articulate and can think more clearly because of extracurricular reading, isn't it worth it?" (p. 41)

The Question of Funding

It can be difficult to secure funding for leisure reading collections, from both conventional and unconventional sources. One may encounter push-back from many constituencies. It may be difficult to get buy-in for the collection, let alone space or funding. As Janelle M. Zauha (1993) mentions, in her article "Recreational Reading in Academic Browsing Rooms: Resources for Readers' Advisory," browsing collections are getting much less institutional support than they used to. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was one of a college librarian's duties to promote reading, and it was an important one at that. Browsing collections even extended outside of the library, in places like the student union and in dormitories. Unfortunately, Zauha (1993) laments, "...new pressures and tighter budgets have greatly affected how academic libraries view and fulfill their missions" (p. 58).

According to Connie Van Fleet (2003) in her article "Popular Fiction Collections in Academic and Public Libraries, "Most librarians—and indeed, taxpayers and faculty—

regard reading for pleasure or personal growth as secondary to information seeking.” She also points out that even though many institutional mission statements include language about cultural and personal growth, rarely is leisure reading ever considered as a means to achieving this (Van Fleet, 2003, p. 69).

When even logical arguments do not make a path toward additional funding from one’s administration, there may be other ways to find funding for these materials. Leisure reading books are typically much less expensive than academic titles and collections do not take a lot of seed money to get started. It can be much easier to obtain funding for hardcover fiction than for university press titles or journals and databases that represent an ongoing cost.

Many libraries have a “friends” organization that fundraises on their behalf. Make the case for a leisure reading collection. Petition the student government for funding. Oftentimes, these organizations have funds from student fees to spend on services for students. A leisure reading collection certainly fits the bill. When all seems to be lost, look toward donations. Many libraries are practically overrun by book donations. Take one of the three donated copies of *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* that you received this year and put it in a place where students will see it instead of selling it in the annual book sale. Among librarians and library staff, one might find many a bibliophile looking to do a home weeding project. Also, one might consider soliciting book donations from students who, at the end of the school year, may be moving out of the dormitories and need to pare down their belongings.

The Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans has a leisure reading collection that was started as a pilot project and was funded by the Student Government.

Book donations are also funneled into the collection when possible. While the program was initiated by a student, who at the time, was President of the Student Government Association, the proposal, taken up by a committee of librarians and staff, encountered much push-back from librarians and senators in the Student Government. Librarians were reluctant to allow a collection that was not in direct support of the curriculum, even though funding was being sought from an outside source. The committee plans to seek ongoing funding from Student Government, after one year of usage statistics is available. For now, the collection is growing with donations of books from patrons, librarians, and library staff.

Hsieh and Runner (2005) reported on a survey of leisure reading collections in academic libraries in the southeastern United States conducted by Linda A Morrissett in 1993. She found that libraries often relied on donations to maintain their collections, but also used funds in the general budget and from friends organizations (Hsieh & Runner, 2005). The authors also conducted their own survey, published in 2005, to look at librarians' attitudes and policies toward textbooks and leisure reading purchasing in academic libraries. The majority of the responding libraries that reported not purchasing leisure reading materials did so because of either budget limitations or a belief that housing these materials was not the role of the academic library (Hsieh & Runner, 2005). The literature shows that neither of these reasons is a sufficient argument against recreational reading materials in academic libraries. All that needs to exist in order to make it happen is a desire to get the collection started and a few donated paperbacks.

Conclusion

The connection between leisure reading in the library and student retention is a cyclical one. Students may be drawn to the library because of its recreational reading collection and by virtue of their use of the collection, the library becomes a more comfortable place. Students will then feel more at-ease coming to the library to do homework and research, thereby increasing the likelihood of academic success. Students may then return to the leisure reading collection while they are in the library studying and doing research, thereby improving their reading skills and further reinforcing the possibility of academic success. It is a process of constant and renewed reinforcement. It is clear that a library collection that supports the curriculum of its institution is necessary, but that a collection that also supports the students is paramount. To serve only the needs of the curriculum would be a mistake. Librarians and administrators must look beyond the direct route of curriculum to collection and see the potential benefits of so-called leisure reading materials. The powers-that-be must foster the growth of students into scholars and understand what is truly needed to make that a reality. They must consider the student as a whole person and not a cog in an academic machine. Let us correct the mistakes of the past and make the love of reading a part of higher education once more.

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