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Non-affiliated Users' Access in Tennessee Academic Libraries

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Introduction

This survey was designed to ascertain how Tennessee public four-year academic libraries were addressing unaffiliated user access to services and resources and related security issues. At one point in time, resources and services were basically limited to the material on the shelf and the personnel employed by the library. Security issues were concerned with student pranks and vandalism and, depending upon location, the issue of vagrants and/or latchkey kids. Access to the building usually meant people had access to all of the material the library had on the shelf and the only question was whether an unaffiliated user could borrow materials.

Services have not changed that much, but library resources have evolved and the question of security has taken on a much more serious connotation. Libraries are now looking at access to computers, commercial databases, and depending upon your library organization, a plethora of AV formats and equipment. Paul Meek Library – University of Tennessee at Martin - is in discussion with our computer center about non-university users' computer and network access, as well as a specific discussion related to checkout of laptops. In addition, our alumni group has approached the library with questions regarding access to various resources that have traditionally been limited to campus users.

All nine of the public university libraries in the state of Tennessee have some mention on their websites of providing services to unaffiliated users. However, their websites did not provide enough detailed information to determine if consideration was being given to issues in a manner similar to other libraries. While consistency may not be of primary importance, it does seem to make it a bit more palatable to staff when we can defend our position with the concept that comparable libraries in the state have similar policies. This shows that we are not being arbitrary or unreasonable.

Literature review

Nancy Courtney (2003) surveyed college and university libraries to determine what kind of access and which privileges were allowed to unaffiliated users. She

determined that the majority of libraries allowed unrestricted access to the building, but borrowing privileges were significantly restricted for non-affiliated users. She also reviewed the increased use of authentication for computers and online resources. In addition, Courtney determined that reasons for allowing access varied from public institutions versus private institutions. Public institutions were more likely to report that they allowed access to materials as the result of state tax support, whereas private institutions were more likely to state that good community relations were the reason for allowing access.

J Michael Shires (2006) surveyed Florida academic libraries to see which resources and services they made available to public users. He determined that, while academic libraries provide services to the public, they do not actively promote those services. Shires brings up the fact that access to library materials is part of the mandate for Federal Depository Libraries as well as the Foundation Center's Cooperating Collection. He brings to our awareness Florida's Ask a Librarian Chat service and the Florida Electronic Library that allows patrons to use their public library card to access databases, as well as other consortial arrangements in the state of Florida. Shires also mentions that creation of joint-use facilities, libraries formed by partnerships of academic, public, and government libraries coming together to share both physical and monetary resources, is increasing due to the growing population base in Florida.

Tuñón, Barsun, and Ramirez (2004) surveyed a large group of librarians to determine their attitudes in regard to distance learners from unaffiliated institutions. A major concern seemed to be making sure the appropriate information was available. An additional concern was that the students would be a drain on the time and resources of the librarians without paying for the services rendered. One statement was that users are paying to get a degree from somewhere else, but not paying tuition dollars for the resources used at the libraries they were visiting. The survey results showed that librarians used their service profession stance to provide all students,

including distance education students, the same access to resources and services.

Weber and Lawrence (2010), in the course of writing computer access policies for their library, came up with several questions regarding research libraries' practices of requiring or not requiring public users to authenticate or log on to computer workstations at their libraries. They surveyed a large group of library directors within the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to determine computer access practices. The results of the survey showed that authentication is required for all computer access at the majority of universities and accommodations will need to be made for patrons who are unaffiliated with the institution. Because most (85%) of the libraries are Federal Depository libraries, there was a concern that services must be provided to allow access to government documents. Several different options to allow this access were presented including librarians logging in for the patron, open access computers, or computers that only allow access to government documents. Another area of concern was the ability of public users to access electronic materials within the libraries' holdings. They suggested that the use of open access computers and working with vendors to reduce restrictions on access may increase the sharing of information. Guidelines were created at Weber and Lawrence's library that let patrons know that open-access computers are available for public use, with the caveat that public users may be asked to allow others to use the computer when needed or only if the computer is not being used for research purposes.

Lenker and Kocovar-Weidinger (2010) suggest using W. D. Ross's theory of Ethical Pluralism to aid librarians and staff when making decisions regarding serving the students and faculty of their institution versus serving the needs of nonaffiliated users. The seven *prima facie* duties of this model are fidelity, beneficence, justice, nonmaleficence, gratitude, reparation, and self-improvement. This method of dealing with problems resulted from the remodeling of Longwood University's Greenwood Library and the addition of an Information Commons model. The library's computing facilities became so popular with the public users that the students had difficulties gaining access to the computers. The library created a new restrictive computer policy, but found it very difficult to enforce, because it was so restrictive to the community members. In working through the seven *prima facie* duties another solution was found for serving both the affiliated and nonaffiliated users. The library installed five computers that have a system which logs off after 30 minutes of use. These computers are primarily for public users and the staff must log them in. If the Information Commons has moderate to heavy use, the staff will determine if there is space for the community patrons and either log them in or request that they return at a later time. The authors suggest that using Ross's theory of Ethical Pluralism is useful not only for determining use of computer resources, but any other library resource as well.

Methodology:

The state of Tennessee lists nine main academic libraries attached to publicly supported campuses. We contacted the nine and had a 100% response rate. The survey consisted of four closed-ended questions and five open-ended questions. An online form using Google Docs survey was created which allowed the creation of a web-based survey with a static URL, allowing individual responses to the survey. Two individuals at each of the state-supported university libraries whose job title or job description (if available) implied a strong public service component were identified. People who might be involved in media checkout policies were also identified. A list of each of these people that included an email address as well as traditional contact information was formed. Next, an email that included the appropriate URL for the survey was created and sent to each of the pre-identified individuals. All responses were recorded by the Google Docs tool, and after approximately one week. Responses were received from four campuses. At that time a paper version of the form was generated and mailed to the individuals who had not responded to the on-line version. A stamped self-addressed envelope and a few pieces of hard candy were included. Once again there was approximately one week for responses and then two schools that had not responded. Those two schools (four individuals) were contacted, explaining that a response from them was needed for a 100% return rate. In both cases responses were received within the week.

For this survey, a deliberate choice was made to survey only public institutions. One of the main reasons for this decision was the question of public versus private funding, and the responsibilities inherent therein. A recipient of state funding may be seen to have an obligation to the local/regional community as a whole, not just the specific university community. It is with this potential obligation in mind that an examination was made of university versus non-university access to library resources.

Results:

Physical Security Issues

Historically, when there was a discussion of library security, it addressed the preservation, safeguarding, and stewardship of the collections housed within the physical building. To achieve these goals, libraries have developed security policies that try to be respectful of the rights of all users while at the same time protecting the items in the collection. Traditional issues included theft of library materials, mutilation or vandalism of library materials, and dealing with disruptive or deviant patrons. Recently, security issues have included access and use of the internet as well as the physical safety of the library staff and its users.

There was a relative consistency in the review of survey responses from the public state universities. In all cases non-affiliated users have access to the building during "normal" business hours. All but one university has

installed security cameras that at least cover the front entrance. There is not a library in this group of institutions that has a security guard or staff member physically checking or limiting access to the building. There are two libraries that do limit access to the building at “late night” by requiring the use of a campus-card swipe system on the door.

Electronic Security Issues

When considering granting access to a computer network, open or otherwise, electronic security becomes an issue, and the security of university computer systems is becoming an increasing concern. Information Technology personnel need to worry about everything from hackers to vandals. This has prompted the consideration of using usernames and passwords on all computers. However, that would also decrease the sense of the library being a place where people have access to all materials. Off campus access now requires authentication, and soon users who are on campus may also have to log in to access materials in the library. Without authentication abilities, non-affiliated users will not be able to access many of the databases and other resources to which the library subscribes. This may limit their research capabilities. In some cases, librarians have offered to log in to the system for non-affiliated users, thus allowing for another set of security issues to arise.

Once access to materials has been granted, the next concern is proper use of the information. Excessive downloads of materials, which are a violation of most vendor agreements, is of primary concern. When patrons try to access too many materials at one time or in quick succession, they may be blocked by the server and their access will be denied. Librarians need to be aware of this situation when it occurs and assist their patrons in proper use of electronic resources.

The survey data shows that most public universities in Tennessee do not allow open access to their electronic resources. A few libraries had public access to OPAC machines, but only one of the libraries in the survey allowed open access to their electronic resources. All other libraries required patrons to have log-in credentials. Also, the majority of respondents indicated that wi-fi service was unavailable to non-university users. Two respondents said that non-university users were asked to pay an annual usage fee for access to the library’s resources.

Lending Security Issues

No libraries in the survey allow non-university borrowers to check out media equipment. There are occasional exceptions made for local educators in specific cases. Given the increasing costs of acquiring and repairing media equipment, concern has been expressed at libraries that non-affiliated users should not be allowed to use or check-out audiovisual equipment. One library did mention that they have older laptops that they allow the public to check out. At Paul Meek Library, there was a situation where the public library was closed for several months. People from the community were requesting use of media equipment

which is primarily lent out to students for use in classes with their professor’s approval.

Discussion

Accessibility Requirements

Some functions of a library may require certain levels of access. For example, a library that has the privilege of being a federal government document repository has an obligation to provide public access. As government documents are increasingly electronic, this necessarily entails public access, at least at some level, to the library’s electronic resources. Also, considerations should be made for providing access to, and finding aids for, other public collections that a library may have. This would include items such as school textbook collections, genealogy resources, or local historical archives.

Electronic Security Access

Offering access to electronic services subjects the institution to certain security risks. Dangers include viruses that can spread rapidly through the entire university community, malicious attacks upon infrastructure that can be instigated from within, abuse of resources, as well as plain old fashioned vandalism. However, denying access also comes with costs.

Public access to library resources has long been the norm in many places. A generation ago, those resources were primarily physical items that could be individually controlled and accounted for. Allowing access to resources was seen as a public service, perhaps even a duty, and “public service” is still often written into university/library mission statements. Also, a university library may be the only area institution with deep enough pockets to be able to provide access to certain software (Adobe Creative Suite, etc.), or devices (planetary scanners, video editors, etc.). Many institutions are facing increasing pressure to provide services, including electronic access, to alumni.

Frequently, especially in the case of rural institutions, the small regional university may be by far the most comprehensive and robust source of information available to area residents, students, and businesses. Furthermore, as information is increasingly presented in the form of online access, those without dependable online access, either because of financial constraints or geographical limitations, are left at a disadvantage. This is arguably the responsibility of the public library, not the university, but in many areas the public library’s resources (materials, staffing, hours of operation, etc.) are frequently inadequate to meet many such needs.

An academic library in a more urban setting may face a different set of problems that require a different approach to accessibility. Ease of access, due to public transportation and foot traffic, may lead to a situation wherein the university library is playing host to too many members of the public, as well as problems with latch-key kids, vagrants, etc. This can create an untenable situation

that is both costly and corrosive to the library's primary function of providing direct support to the university community.

Media Equipment Security

University libraries also tend to have collections of media equipment available to lend. Equipment such as video recorders, digital cameras, and P. A. systems are often used by students and staff for various projects, presentations, and events. The increasingly high cost of purchase and maintenance for up-to-date equipment has led to concern and doubt regarding the lending of AV equipment to non-affiliated users. However, some users feel, as taxpayers, it is not unreasonable for them to be able to access all of the resources the library has to offer. Moreover, AV equipment is often purchased not with "tax" money, but rather with alternate funding sources. These other sources, including student technology fees, may make the "taxpayer" argument invalid.

Conclusion

The conversation on public access to library resources and electronic security implies a tangential conversation about a library's physical security. No longer merely concerned with the pick-pockets, purse snatchers, and perverts of yesteryear, libraries must now remain vigilant against deeper threats such as campus shooters or mad bombers. Any obligation to public service must be weighed against the university's obligation to provide for the safety and security of its students and staff.

All in all, there are a great many questions, potential problems, and possible solutions surrounding the issue of non-affiliated user access to public academic library resources. While each library undoubtedly has its own unique challenges based on resource availability, environment, intended mission, administrative style, etc., libraries are facing similar concerns with regard to responsible stewardship of public trust, particularly as libraries move toward an information access model, rather than an information ownership model. While each library would certainly need its own solutions to its own problems, the greater conversation on non-affiliated user access is one that is worth having.

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Appendix 1 - Survey – Non-affiliated Users' Access in Tennessee Public University Libraries

Please select all answers that apply to your library.

1. What type of security provisions do you have installed at your library?

- Card swipe limiting access to faculty, staff, and students
- Security guard checking credentials at entrance
- Student/library employee checking credentials at entrance
- A sign that explains who is eligible to use the building
- A security camera that views people entering/leaving the building
- Anyone can walk in and no security cameras
- Other: _____

Please select all answers that apply to your library.

2. What definition do you use for non-university borrowers?
- Any adult who is not a faculty member, student, or staff member
 - Any adult who lives in a defined geographic area
 - Alumni from your institution
 - Emeritus Faculty
 - Retired Faculty
 - Retired Staff
 - Individuals enrolled in dual credit classes
 - Individuals younger than 18
 - Other: _____

3. Are non-university borrowers allowed to use library services? Yes No

4. Please place an X in the box if the service is available to borrowers:

Service	Students/Faculty/Staff	Non-university borrowers
access to reference services		
check out books		
check out DVD/Video collection		
check out AV equipment		
access public computers/no login		
access public computers require login		
access Wi-Fi system on own computer		
access only OPAC on a public computer		
check out laptop		
reserve room for class/meeting		
access online databases from building		
access online database from off-campus		
copiers		
printers		
overhead scanners		

Please answer the following questions:

5. Are there specific written policies in place regarding public access to resources? Can you provide a summary statement?
6. What type of informal customs regarding access to building/resources are in place?
7. Do you charge students/faculty/staff a fee per use? If so, for what items?
8. Do you charge non-university borrowers a fee per use? If so, for what items?
9. Do you provide special services for area businesses, law firms, medical staff, or local educators?

10. Is your library considering changing access policies? If so, what changes are being discussed?

Appendix 2 – Survey Responses- Non-affiliated Users’ Access in Tennessee Public University Libraries

Security provision			
Card Swipe	3	late night study	33%
Security Guard	0		
Student Employee	0		
Signage	0		
Camera	6	in the stairways	66%
Anyone is allowed access	1		11%
Other	1	Keyfob access for staff after hours	11%

Services allowed to borrowers				
	Students/Faculty/Staff	Non-university Borrowers	Comments	
Access to Reference Services	9	9		100%
Check out books	9	9	Purchase card for \$25.00	100%
Check out dvd/video	9	7		78%
Check out av equipment	7	0		0%
access public computers no login	3	4		44%
access public computers with log-in	9	3	Purchase either \$25 card or \$5 online card	33%
access wi-fi system on own computer	9	2		22%
access only OPAC on public computer	4	5	Can also access databases and internet	56%
Check out laptop	8	2		22%
reserve room for class/meeting	9	0		0%
access online database from building	9	8		89%
access online database from off campus	9	0		0%
copiers	9	9	Purchase online card	100%
printers	9	5		56%
overhead scanners	5	4	Flatbeds, but no public overheads	44%

Non-university borrowers allowed to use services				
2	Yes	9	Some	100%
3	No	0		

Charge fee							
Student /faculty /staff	6	Technology access fee for students, Copiers and printers, overdue fees	Students pay a \$25 fee	Copiers and printers	printing-cardswipe, copying-coin operated machines	copying and printing, students pay fees as part of tuition	66%
non-university	5	\$50 borrower card	\$50 card	Copiers and printers	copying-coin operated machines	copying and printing, offer \$25 borrowers card for purchase on an annual basis	55%

Definition of non-university borrower	
Any Adult	7
Geographic Area Adult	5
Alumni	5
Emeritus Faculty	3
Retired Faculty	5
Retired Staff	4
Dual credit enrollees	1
Younger than 18	5
Other	2

Provide special services to educators, law, medical?						
Yes	5	Educators get a free card, others use reference services often	Cooperative Law Collection is funded by a TN private act so resources are available to lawyers and the public	Local teachers can borrow for free	Many businesses and law firms use our Gov. Publications resources	Outreach to K-12 schools, Cultural programming for community but no services
No	4					