

Promoting Reading for Pleasure in Academia to Educate the “Whole Person”

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Abstract

Since the mid--20th century, following the gradual commodification and corporatization of universities, higher education has become “less a means for discovery and intellectual exploration than a means to greater earning potential and job stability,”[1] inter alia, chasing away the deep, contemplative reading of imaginative literature. Yet, in an increasingly complex, fluid, and interconnected world, “the ability to participate fully in societal decisions on global warming, genetic engineering, foreign policy, and other issues may be contingent on being able to stay with and focus on ideas in a way fostered by reading, and more specifically by avid reading, reading for pleasure”[2]. This realization can account for such trends as the proliferation of Medical Humanities programs on campus, the inclusion of literature and art courses in the Business and Law School curricula, and a resurgence of interest in the library practice of readers’ advisory (RA) in academia in the last 10--15 years. Tracing a brief history of RA in academic libraries in North America, we will focus on the potential contribution of RA to educating the “whole person”[3], a well--rounded individual and an informed citizen who, aside from professional skills, possesses a holistic vision of the world, commitment to social justice and democracy, cultural sensitivity, open--mindedness, creativity, and personal integrity. Positing RA as a “pedagogical strategy with transformative potential,” we will discuss the possible ways of integrating RA into university courses and its interplay with currently expanding information literacy education delivered by academic librarians. We will also address the difficulty of implementing RA in academic libraries, most of which still consider this practice a frill, rather than an integral and indispensable part of the academic library mission and higher education. The talk will be guided by an interdisciplinary perspective of Library & Information Science and engage a diverse audience.

[1, 2] R. Smith and N. J. Young, “Giving Pleasure Its Due: Collection Promotion and Readers’ Advisory in Academic Libraries,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 34, no. 6 (2008): 520--521. [3] A Hallyburton, H. Buchanan, and T. Carsten, “Serving the Whole Person: Popular Materials in Academic Libraries”, *Collection Building* 30, no. 2 (2011): 109--112.