

Small Libraries as Community Partners

Paving the Way

Elizabeth Young Miller, Information Literacy and Seminary Liaison Librarian, Reeves Library, Moravian University and Moravian Theological Seminary

Susan Ebertz, Associate Professor, Director of the Reu Memorial Library, Wartburg Theological Seminary

Daniel F. Flores, University Librarian, Assistant Professor, and Chair of Library Science, Blumberg Memorial Library, Texas Lutheran University

ABSTRACT Panelists Susan Ebertz, Daniel F. Flores, and Elizabeth Young Miller provided brief institutional snapshots of their respective institutions before discussing how their library mission statements and/or institutional strategic plans address community service. Each panelist shared examples of how their respective institutions engage in outreach and community service.

SLIG

Small libraries can be defined in various ways, and the Atla Small Libraries Interest Group (SLIG) takes a very inclusive approach when it comes to the term *small libraries*. Essentially, the SLIG interest group welcomes all librarians and library staff regardless of the size of their respective institutions.

MORAVIAN UNIVERSITY AND MORAVIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Elizabeth Young Miller is Information Literacy and Seminary Liaison at the Reeves Library, Moravian University and Theological Seminary, which is located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The institution offers several master's degree programs, which include the following: Master of Arts in Chaplaincy (MACH), Master of Arts in Divinity (MDiv), Master of Arts in Formation and Ministry (MAFM), and Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS). The seminary is embedded

within Moravian University, and one library serves all students and faculty across the institution. Moravian Theological Seminary is also in the process of combining with Lancaster Theological Seminary.

At Moravian, both the library's mission statement and vision statement are under revision and are not currently included on the library's website. Both, however, are included in the student employee handbook. While the library's mission statement does not explicitly include community service or outreach, the library's vision statement mentions using information in service to the community. Moravian University's strategic plan, as well as Moravian Theological Seminary's mission statement and Statement of Core Values, highlight equity, justice, service, and hospitality. One of the university's strategic plan pillars is "together towards equity." Part of the seminary's mission statement found on Moravian Seminary's "Mission and Values" webpage reads as follows: "Rooted in the Moravian heritage of ... service, we welcome students preparing to serve in diverse socioeconomic ... contexts." Several of the seminary's core values address service. These service-related core values are also listed on the seminary's "Mission and Values" webpage and include the following: "hospitality and open and affirming engagement with diverse people and cultures," and "faithful advocacy for justice in local, national, and global contexts." The examples that follow speak to these values.

Reeves Library at Moravian has sponsored fines forgiveness programs to address equity and justice and to extend hospitality to the local community, as well as current students. Initially, fines forgiveness events occurred twice a year, at the end of each semester. Instead of collecting overdue fines, the library opted to collect items to support our community. Some years around Christmas time, we had a mitten tree—requesting donations of hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves that were then donated to a local elementary school. The library also supported this local elementary school by collecting non-perishable food items that could be sent home in weekend backpacks with students.

The library supported this local elementary school until Mo's Cupboard was created. A former seminary student, Lisa Johnson, was instrumental in the creation of Mo's Cupboard, which addresses food insecurity on campus. She is featured in the video on the university's website showcasing Mo's Cupboard (Moravian 2021). Jill Anderson, the Vice President for Development and Alumni Engagement, shared in an email dated June 1, 2022, that Mo's Cupboard has been visited over 2,100 times this year, by close to 340 students.

Food insecurity is a growing concern on college and university campuses. In an article in *Forbes* from August 2021, rates of food insecurity ranging from 30 to 50 percent are cited (Rowan 2021). Certainly, the pandemic has contributed to this increased rate. In the 2020 article “Empty Shelves: How Your Academic Library Can Address Food Insecurity,” Lana Mariko Wood emphasizes the role her library has played in addressing this issue. She argues that, given a library’s often central location on campus and extended hours, libraries are an ideal place for a food and essential needs pantry (Wood 2020, 324). Wood also highlights that libraries are also perfect for this type of service because they are well versed in protecting patrons’ privacy and are experts at outreach (2020, 323). For libraries interested in starting a food pantry, Wood recommends the College and University Food Bank Alliance’s (CUFBA’s) “Getting Started Toolkit” (2020, 324).

To promote equity, Moravian decided this year to remove fines altogether. As a result, the question emerges: how can the library continue to support initiatives such as Mo’s Cupboard? Brainstorming with a colleague generated the idea of sponsoring a “spring cleaning event” to share food and other essential items. Another idea worth exploring is creating a LibGuide with information on local food pantries and other emergency aid services, which Wood suggests in her article (2020, 324). Local clergy may be able to provide some content for such a guide, as well as other campus resources.

THE WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

I, Susan Ebertz, am the director of the library at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. Our FTE is about 180 students. Two-thirds of our students are distance students. Because of this, we need to make sure to include our distance students in our programs and planning. We have three degree-granting programs and several certificate programs. Our library staff includes me and a part-time paraprofessional. We need to make sure that anything we do can be done with little staffing.

Wartburg Theological Seminary Mission Statement

The Wartburg Theological Seminary Mission Statement has been around for many years. The seminary uses this mission statement in how it plans worship, learning, and mission as central to many activities. The Wartburg Theological Seminary Mission Statement states the following.

Wartburg Theological Seminary serves Christ's church through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning.

I want to emphasize the latter part of the statement where it says that learning is not for its own sake but that it is to lead to mission. It also says that what we do in mission, or in the context of this session on community partnerships, helps us in our learning.

The second part of the mission statement says:

The community embodies God's mission by stewarding resources for engaging, equipping, and sending collaborative leaders who interpret, proclaim, and live the gospel of Jesus Christ for a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.

The part of the mission statement that I would like to highlight is "in need of personal and social healing." We then see that our seminary mission statement does talk about ministry to the community implicitly but not necessarily explicitly.

Library Vision Statement

In 2020, Interim President Kristine Stache wanted the library to create a vision statement to guide the seminary in plans for the possible remodeling of the building in which the library resides. She created a Presidential Library Task Force consisting of faculty, students, and the library director. The task force crafted a Library Vision Statement which was approved by the faculty in November 2020. It states as follows:

The Library of Wartburg Theological Seminary will serve Wartburg's mission to form leaders for the church by serving as a space, both physically and digitally, to gather its community near and far to foster relationships, inspire and support learning, and enrich ongoing formation.

The library vision statement does not speak explicitly about building community partnerships outside of the Wartburg community. As mentioned in the seminary's mission statement, learning is to lead to mission, so inspiring and supporting learning means supporting ministry. Enriching ongoing formation would be included in being involved in helping to learn to lead to mission. One of the points in the library vision statement talks about "supporting their continued development as leaders for the church." Learning by building community partnerships would develop their leadership.

Community Partnerships

We have partnered with our community in a couple of ways. First, through the Iowa Open Access program. Any citizen of Iowa may check out books from our library for free. Iowa citizens can create a library account with us by filling out an application and showing us identification, so we know that they do live in Iowa. This also means that our students can check out items from any Iowa Open Access Library. We are also members of DALINC which is a Dubuque area library consortium. This allows us additional reciprocal borrowing with those who are not Iowa Open Access Libraries. Students and faculty of one of the local small universities use our theological collection. We also participate in Interlibrary Loan with any Iowa library.

The second way was a one-time event at our seminary. During the past year, a couple of our students volunteered at St. Mark's Youth Enrichment. St. Mark's provides after-school, weekend, and summer tutoring and enrichment programming for children. This Christmas the two students spearheaded a drive to collect winter clothing for the children involved in St. Mark's programs. The students created a registry at Target. As I mentioned earlier, two-thirds of our students are distance students. Having an online registry meant that our distance students could also participate in the purchase of items. Our residential students, faculty, and staff could either purchase the gifts at the local store or purchase them online. The registry assured that the number of requested items would be purchased. The method helped all of our community participate in this gift-giving.

TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Texas Lutheran University (TLU) is a small, private university related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), located in Seguin, Texas. Founded in 1891 as The Evangelical Lutheran College in Brenham, Texas, its mission was to train German immigrants to become Lutheran pastors. The campus was moved to Seguin in 1912 in response to a generous invitation from the Businessmen's Club of Seguin, who were desirous of a local college. They offered the school 15 acres and free water as an incentive. Blinn College, founded by German Methodists, was first in line but they declined the land grant deal and opted to remain in Brenham. Texas Lutheran University now owns 184 acres and remote nursing school campuses in New Braunfels and Houston. Student enrollment in 2021–2022 was just under 1,300.

Dr. David Maldonado's sociological study of Seguin, *Crossing Guadalupe Street*, maps the racial segregation of the rural town relative to the centrally located Guadalupe Street, (Maldonado 2001). White residents settled in neighborhoods on the east of the street. Interestingly, Texas Lutheran's campus was established in a cotton field on the west side of the street. The neighborhoods there are historically populated by Black and Hispanic people. However, the linguistic, ethnographic, Lutheran religious identity and economic advantages of the predominantly German-heritage community of Texas Lutheran have kept them isolated from their neighbors for almost a century. Only recently have more Black and Hispanic students become numerous in the student body. This was made possible by the availability of scholarships and intentional student recruiting. TLU officially became a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) only in the last decade. This status is achieved when enrollment reaches a minimum of 25 percent Hispanic students. TLU now has approximately 40 percent Hispanic students.

In January 2021, the university hired Dr. David Ortiz, formerly of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), as their inaugural Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. My (Daniel Flores's) appointment in June 2021 as University Librarian was part of the diversification drive that has added more Hispanics and African Americans to the faculty and administration than ever in the 100-year history of the institution. TLU continues to explore ways we can achieve its faith-based mission statement:

As a community of faith and learning, Texas Lutheran University empowers a diverse student body through an education centered on the liberal arts and professional programs. In pursuit of a more just world, TLU is committed to academic excellence, servant leadership, and career development.

The Blumberg Memorial Library's mission statement was written in 1997. Unfortunately, it has not been updated since 2005. It is inwardly focused on the TLU community. However, I see something positive and inclusive in the word "access."

The mission of the Blumberg Memorial Library is primarily to provide access to organized information to the TLU community and to teach students techniques of locating and evaluating information, which will assist them to develop as informed and resourceful persons.

While the library does not have a strategic plan, TLU's 2025 Strategic Plan has promise as a workable pathway to meeting our institutional mission:

1. Strengthen and expand the student experience.
2. Diversify and strengthen academic programs.
3. Embrace and celebrate a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
4. Establish a predictable business model that provides financial stability.
5. Create strong partnerships and collaborations. (Texas Lutheran University, 2022)

Strategic goal number five speaks directly to the institution's desire for increased community engagement. There are three initiatives under this goal's heading, the first strongly suggesting community partnerships, though not specifically mentioning the role of the library:

Enhance work with local entities, including Guadalupe Regional Medical Center, chambers of commerce, Seguin Economic Development Corporation, and other local businesses, educational institutions, advocacy groups, and industries, to increase partnerships and programs that benefit TLU and the local community.

TLU's history of collaborations with the community in public programs is impressive. Their STEM, music, and dance programs draw hundreds to the campus each year. However, I had not observed or heard any anecdotal evidence of the library's direct involvement with community outreach to the people of Seguin. Having recently completed the editing of *Los Profetas*, a book on the prophetic ministry of Hispanic churches, I wondered whether libraries could also be agents of change by acting prophetically in their communities (Flores 2022). I reached out to *Teatro de Artes de Juan Seguin*, a local Mexican American cultural arts center, to ask if they would be open to us hosting an art exhibit for their organization in our new library gallery. They accepted the invitation with enthusiasm.

In Fall 2021, the Blumberg Memorial Library hosted an art exhibit entitled "Celebrating the Life and Artwork of Reynaldo 'Rey' Luján-Gaytán" (Texas Lutheran University 2021). Luján-Gaytán was an artist and activist with ties to Teatro de Artes de Juan Seguin. Sadly, he passed away due to complications of contracting the COVID virus. The display consisted of several framed posters of his original art and drawings with themes of spirituality and social justice. Kevin

Medford, TLU's Help Desk Coordinator, set up a monitor to show the video "A Tribute to Rey Lujan Gaytan" (YouTube 2021).

On September 21, 2021, the opening night of the exhibit featured live Mexican polka music and Ballet Folklorico performers in the library gallery. Several of these dancers performed in the library's courtyard while over 100 visitors were treated to dinner prepared by a local food truck restaurant. Campus collaborations from the Division of Visual Arts, Mexican American Student Association, Proud to be First Gen, Campus Programs, and the Moline Center for Servant Leadership assisted with volunteers and funds to cover our overhead expenses.

The goodwill generated by hosting this community art show is still bearing fruit. Six months after the event, we were surprised when Dahlia G. Arambula donated a framed poster by her late brother Luján-Gaytán entitled "Compassionate Universe." In Fall 2022, Teatro de Artes de Juan Seguin and the Seguin Public Library will be our community partners in the NEA Big Read Seguin, thanks to a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts managed by Arts Midwest. I will conclude with the observation that community partnerships are most successful when we are transformed in the process.

MENTIMETER

At the start of the panel discussion, participants were invited to participate in a Mentimeter poll, responding to the question: Why did you decide to attend this session today? Responses varied but the consensus was that many attendees work at small libraries.

After institutional snapshots were shared, attendees were invited to respond to the following questions using Mentimeter:

1. Have you looked at your strategic plan lately? (yes/no)
2. When was the last time your strategic plan was updated?
 - a. 1–2 years ago
 - b. 2–5 years ago
 - c. 5+ years ago
 - d. I don't know
3. Is your strategic plan in need of updates? (yes/maybe/no)
4. Is outreach mentioned in your strategic plan? (yes/no/not sure)

Responses varied. The panel ended with a lively Q&A session in person and online.

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