HERE’S THE STORY:
WHAT EXACTLY CAN LIBRARIES DO?

A BACKGROUND PAPER FROM

THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
OF
THE CONNECTICUT LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
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WHAT EXACTLY CAN LIBRARIES DO?

In this day and age of the Internet, libraries of all types are not fully understood. The Connecticut Library Association commissioned a series of background papers to explain, in nontechnical terms, the rôle of the library in the world today and the scope and potential for services.

Librarians divide libraries into four types, each with a specific rôle. The four types are: public, school (covering kindergarten through high school), academic (including all post-secondary institutions), and special (including corporations, institutions like prisons and hospitals, and nonprofit organizations).

Attached are the answers to the question: What exactly can libraries do?

Michael A. Golrick, President 1999/2000
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Public Libraries

Community libraries are a public benefit endorsed by the Founding Fathers as essential to a self-governing people.

Connecticut had several of the first communities which offered these tax-supported lifelong learning resources to all residents. No matter how many private funds are bestowed on libraries to help them extend their services, their most important funding comes from being rooted in the needs and hopes of those who vote taxes to support them.

The wisest private benefactor of libraries to date, Andrew Carnegie, understood the significance of public support. He required that his gift of buildings to hundreds of communities across the land be matched by community effort. The people who were to use it turned each building into the center for books, discovery, and shared ideas that they wanted to sustain.

Public libraries and public schools developed side by side throughout the 19th century. They are still the only institutions freely accessible to most individuals for customized growth of mental capacity, understanding of feelings and emotions and enhancement of the spirit.

Most other public services address crises or physical needs. The library is the only public agency which serves the minds of ALL of the population, one individual at a time.
Here are some of the many things that public libraries can do:

For Preschool Children

- Libraries provide the only freely accessible center open to all children from birth to school age which offers books and other objects to enjoy and learn from, to listen to, and begin to talk about with parents and other care-givers. The tools and training for early brain development and encouraging baby to bond with a significant adult are here.
- Libraries help parents learn about good parenting and helping children to develop language and other mental skills, as well as emotional stability.
- Librarians model reading aloud, storytelling, learning to enjoy communication with music, puppets, games, and dramatic play, so that parents/care givers in daycare and other family serving agencies can practice with children at other times and in other places.
- By talking about stories and books, pictures and videos with young children, librarians stimulate imagination, and help children to link their own experiences to those other people in places and situations different from their own.
- Librarians coordinate outreach services to children with those of social agencies and health providers at sites where waiting is tedious, such as clinics. They help to lay a foundation of motivation and enjoyment that will make later reading instruction in school more successful. Many libraries partner with Head Start to develop family literacy programs.
- Librarians organize collections of books, databases, videos, and other media for the use of professionals in the community concerned in any way with children and families, as well as for parents and families themselves.
- Preschool children begin to learn from books and other library experiences about personality, cultural, and other differences between themselves and others. Stories and discussion about the diversity of people and life situations prepare them to reach out and respect others.

For Elementary and Middle School Ages

- Librarians provide out-of-school programming for school-age children as well as access to homework help and learning resources on evenings, holidays, and weekends.
- Libraries provide resources and assistance to home-schooled students and their parents.
- Librarians in most Connecticut libraries run summer reading programs for school age children which involve children of varying ages as well as family members. Research has shown that these programs can sustain, even enhance, reading skills over the summer vacation.
- Librarians initiate partnerships with museums, science discovery centers, and recreation centers to help children to link insights from one experience to another and follow up on what interests them in various ways.
- Librarians guide children to materials that can help them to develop a sense of identity, a sense of place and belonging to family, neighborhood, community, and country.
- Librarians help children to develop positive awareness of generations, and experience intergenerational friendships through the use of both materials and adult resource people with special interest and expertise.

For Middle School and High School Ages

- Librarians are role models and mentors when they interact with teens in the library. While answering a reference question, helping with homework assignments, or troubleshooting a computer problem, librarians foster relationships with the adolescents they serve. Research shows that a friendship with an interested, encouraging, and trustworthy adult can make an enormous and positive difference in the lives of young people. Teenagers especially need a good and non-judgemental listener in the struggle to discover who they are and who they want to be.
Librarians collaborate with community agencies, such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs which focus on the adult mentoring of teens with the support of such initiatives as America’s Promise, The Alliance for Youth, to encourage and facilitate communication and learning with a knowledgeable and empathetic adult with whom to discuss the kinds of ideas found in libraries.

Discussion groups spinning off from books read, videos, films or the Internet can be a great source of opinion formation, self expression, and command of language. Fears, a sense of isolation, and concerns about personal relationships can be impacted positively by peer communication as well as one-on-one communication with deft adult guidance.

Libraries provide opportunities for teenagers to raise self-expectations and aspirations by giving them opportunities to undertake leadership roles both within the library and in the wider community. Teens serve on advisory boards in many libraries, recommend materials for purchase, act as technology volunteers who help patrons to use the library technology, and train to help younger children with reading and homework. These experiences often encourage teens to contribute to community initiatives, and lead to opportunities for employment.

Libraries are full of books, videos, and other resources that can help “turn around” teens who have made a bad start, given way to violent impulses, fallen prey to substance abuse, or come under court jurisdiction. Librarians partner with juvenile justice and other social agencies to support troubled teens in their communities with library services and programs, such as literacy and homework programs, support groups for teen parents, use of the library’s technology, books, magazines, videos, and music. Juvenile justice officials — family court judges, parole and probation officers — are unanimous in their belief that illiteracy, falling behind, and failure in school often leads to this situation for youth. Many believe that libraries should play a major role in helping to rehabilitate these young people.

Libraries are not just about reading — they are also about writing and learning to express and communicate, whether on paper or disk. Many young people, who have never known a world without computers, feel very comfortable processing their thoughts on screen. Libraries hold poetry and other creative writing sessions which often involve computers which many children do not have access to at home. Of course, like all children from elementary school on, teens are great users of the library’s technology for research and study.

For Young Adults— Ages 18-25

Libraries provide much excellent information about higher education possibilities of all kinds, as well as about jobs and careers. Technology has enabled even the smallest library, if it is tied into a system or network, to obtain all kinds of written material and data from other libraries and information centers— including the Library of Congress.

Libraries assist high school dropouts or young people unable to attend college to embark on individually planned study programs in which the library collaborates with adult education agencies.

Librarians are involved in many kinds of programs that assist teenage mothers to continue their education while learning how to parent and to help their baby to learn and prepare for later education.

Libraries help young people who live far away from family and old friends to find new interests, hobbies, and life paths.

Libraries offer assistance to young adults of 18-25 in a variety of ways. Many of these young people see before them crossroads and experience uncertainties about goals, job or career paths, personality differences, sex and marriage, and perhaps a sudden and total responsibility for self. Libraries provide the resources for self knowledge, inspiration, and solace.
For Adults (of all ages)

✦ Libraries are useful in many ways to adult men and women who are under pressure — practicing life management skills (which most were never taught and have to learn the hard way) — and juggling work and parenting at the same time. Libraries provide practical handbooks on every possible subject, as well as materials and space in which to pursue independent study.

✦ Libraries are essential to people who run small businesses, and now, especially to home-based business people. Telephone reference services are a lifeline to such clients, as are databases, interlibrary loan, and journal articles.

✦ Libraries know well that parents with young children are the most avid of library users. Many kinds of materials and services are available to make the parenting part of their lives more productive.

✦ Libraries are also a necessity to professionals in every field who need specific information and need it immediately. However great their devotion and use of the Internet, many thoughtful people recognize that they require professional help in sorting through the mass of useless or incorrect information flooding the World Wide Web. Librarians are trained to provide this type of help.

✦ Libraries provide the most satisfaction and comfort of any institution to people as they advance to maturity. Many use them to catch up with areas for which they previously have had little time. For instance, travel films and books and periodicals are much sought to prepare for a trip.

✦ Libraries are very useful for retirement planning, and for access to financial material. In retirement, and with once again, perhaps, small children in their lives, many grandparents love to take their grandchildren to the library and sit in on intergenerational programs.

✦ Libraries boast thousands of the most desirable, devoted, and constant volunteers in our society. Library literacy programs would probably not be able to exist and prosper as they do without older adult volunteers. Library grandparents, as older volunteers, are often called, read to little children, play board games, and sit in on discussions with older children, talk and listen to teenagers. As with teenagers, the library gives older adults a priceless opportunity to be useful, to contribute some of their wisdom and experience to those who need it.

✦ Libraries enhance the quality of life for seniors by offering books on audiotape and CD to those who cannot see to read, delivering books and other materials to the home bound, and bringing books, videos and films to nursing homes and other senior residences.

Libraries serve all

✦ Many materials mentioned above for specific age groups, are available to all library users.

✦ The Connecticut State Library provides special services through the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to those who cannot see, have difficulty reading, or have difficulty physically handling books.

✦ Libraries have been in the vanguard of public agencies in making their facilities and services available to all users regardless of physical abilities. (Libraries have striven to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.)
WHAT EXACTLY CAN LIBRARIES DO?

School Library Media Centers

Background/History

Vital school media centers of 2000 bear little resemblance to the traditional school library one would have experienced in K-12 education as recently as ten years ago. Library media programs have improved instruction and achievement for all students. When students and teachers have access to a relevant collection which supports both their curricular and recreational needs, along with stimulating professionally trained staff teaching utilization skills, schools produce information literate individuals capable of finding, evaluating, and judiciously using information in an ever-changing world where the amount of information available continues to be produced at a dizzying rate.

In 1998/99 Keith Curry Lance of the Colorado Department of Education conducted a study of the impact of school library media programs in three states: Alaska, Pennsylvania and Colorado. This study looked at over 800 schools, both elementary and secondary (middle school and high school). It examined staffing levels, staff activities, collection holdings by format, usage levels and available technology. Related data examined included: state reading test scores, adult educational attainment, socioeconomic differences, racial-ethnic demographics, teacher-pupil ratio, and teacher preparation. Five sets of predictors for the development of academic achievement are cited: library media program development, leadership, collaboration, technology, and flexible scheduling. The conclusion is that a good library media program in the school is the best predictor of a high level of student achievement.

In the first half of the 20th century, there were very few organized, professionally staffed centralized libraries in elementary schools. There were mainly scattered high school libraries in cities, the best being in the so-called Latin Schools. Most often a closet or a section of hallway had a few ancient castoffs that were called a “library,” and there was no library media teacher. Sometimes the public library sent a small selection of books to a school and a volunteer took care of them. Even in high school, teachers stuck to the text and sought nothing more to use with students.

With the publication of the school library standards in the 1960s, there was a major, multifaceted, national campaign to promote the importance of school libraries. Enlightened elementary school principals started to develop central libraries and hire librarians to staff them. A dedicated title for library materials in the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and funding for educating school librarians in the companion Higher Education Act set the great wave of school library development into motion. It has been a factor in changing education for the better. The most recent school library media program standards, Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, were published in 1998. Its thrust is to develop the fundamentals of lifelong learning in students.

Every school needs and deserves a high-quality library media program, one that includes a comprehensive instructional program so students are prepared to function effectively as students, citizens, workers and consumers in our information- and technology-rich society.

Quality school library media programs provide a balance of instructional interactions involving three interrelated areas.

- The ability to use technology and to find, synthesize, and report appropriate information. This is the most visible element of recent change in school library media centers. Within the school library media program this means learning to use computers and other technology as a tool to find, use, manipulate, or create information. This includes:

  - Searching databases including on-line card catalogs, on-line services, the Internet, and CD-ROMs.

  - Learning to present information using standard software such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, graphing tools, and multimedia presentation programs.
The ability to apply the search process to solve information needs and problems. The library media program provides training appropriate to age and grade level throughout the K-12 years, including:

- Ability to recognize an information need
- Ability to locate and collect information
- Ability to organize this information in order to communicate one’s findings to others
- Ability to evaluate the process

Mastery of the search and communication process is achieved only through access to, and guided practice with, a wide variety of both print and electronic resources.

Last is the conventional and enduring concept which remains crucial: that the school library media specialist helps the student develop the love of books and a lifelong reading habit. This requires access to much more than textbooks and includes:

- Reading guidance to support the study of literature, to recognize the author’s and illustrator’s style and technical skill, and to value the varying categories of writing (poems, plays, essays, diaries, biographies, novels, factual exposition);

- Having access to age-appropriate literature provides enjoyment which drives development of skill, language use, imagination, insight into feelings of self and others, and leads to lifelong literacy.

What is required is a balance of the three to meet the instructional goals of the school. The effective school library media program serves as the unifying element of the instructional program schoolwide. This means that in a high quality program:

- The library media collection is developed to support the needs of all curriculum areas.
- The library media collection reflects a range of reading levels and formats to support different learning styles and abilities.
- The library media program must meet the learning needs of individual students.
- Library media program specialists must work closely with teachers so that all students, in spite of differing abilities, will be able to learn the basic required content while those who are more able will be sufficiently challenged.

In quality schools with the greatest number of students achieving the greatest success in the instructional/learning program, the library media specialist is involved in curriculum development and instructional planning with classroom teachers and specialists.

The library media specialist provides staff development for teachers relating to information literacy and technology, as well as new professional resources in specific subject fields.

The balance of the three major components shifts as students develop. Listed below are the areas emphasized by the school library media specialist at the High School, Middle School, and Elementary levels.

High School

Students at the high school level are more sophisticated and divergent in their information and technology needs. These students require varied and wide access to information outside the school. These needs demand expanded and networked technology and borrowing resources from other libraries. At the high school level:

- Students will need to be taught how to evaluate the most appropriate source to meet their information needs. Further, they continue to need to recognize evidence of Internet authenticity, accuracy and bias. For most other materials in the collection, the librarian’s selection process with its careful evaluation, tends to filter out misinformation.

- Users of a web page must learn to make evaluations on their own. Students often choose to search the Internet, an unorganized mass of both accurate and inaccurate information, without considering the use of print resources.

- It is the responsibility of the professional staff in the library media center to provide students and teachers with guidance in selecting the best resources for their purpose. For example, students will often request use of the Internet rather than a dictionary when they merely need to find the meaning of a word. They will spend hours surfing the net unsuccessfully to find information readily available in traditional print resources such as an almanac.
Despite increasing use of technology, there is still a need and a continuing role for reading guidance and promotion of reading as a lifelong habit.

**Middle School**

At the Middle School level, the emphasis is on information. Student research and collaboration on assignments take on a greater significance. Reading for pleasure and literacy development continues, but the search for information becomes more prominent. Reading skills are now sufficient to allow the student to gain information independently. Whether using computer technology or print, reading is essential. Characteristics of Middle School include:

- Students have more open-ended assignments
- Students have freer choice when selecting topics
- Students produce a wider variety of finished products.
- School library media specialists work very closely with classroom teachers to expand the search strategies of students and to recognize the use of appropriate resources in terms of authenticity, accuracy and bias in the information presented.
- Students increase their use of technology including on-line services, CD formatted reference sources, the Internet, as well as presentation tools.

**Elementary School**

The focus at the elementary level is on establishing competent and confident reading habits. This important emphasis is strong through the elementary grades. While learning to become proficient readers, they have their first research experiences.

- Time is given to sharing stories, having discussions about them, talking about how they are created, and developing reading incentive activities.
- Along with the development of appreciation for reading and expression, and relating the child’s own experience to what is read, awareness grows of the need for information if one is to communicate effectively.
- Students are introduced to the various print and electronic resources. While carrying out classroom assignments, they are provided with guided practice which will lead to independence.
- Technology is used to foster the appreciation for reading and information handling. For example, first graders can, with a computer graphing program, analyze data and draw high-level conclusions. There is no lack of ability to interpret data generated with the computer graphing program. Software is also available to assist the creative writing process. It is through the collaboration of the classroom teacher with the library media teacher that this type of classroom activity evolves.

The school library media center functions as the information and communications center of the school. It provides access to information through carefully selected and systematically organized collections of diverse learning resources.

School library media specialists provide leadership, instruction, and consulting assistance in the use of instructional and information technology. The diversity of students and the complexity of subject matters demands individualization of instruction. As the scope and intensity of library media services has expanded, the need for professionally-trained staff has become increasingly evident.

A school without a vital library media program shortchanges its students and makes teaching and learning less than it might be. Effective school library media programs encourage students to become discerning learners. Effective library media programs provide intellectual access to information with activities for selecting, retrieving, analyzing, synthesizing, and creating information.
WHAT EXACTLY CAN LIBRARIES DO?

Academic Libraries

Connecticut has over 60 academic libraries in a diverse mix of publicly-supported and private colleges and universities. These offer everything from two-year Associate’s degrees (e.g., the 12 community colleges) to doctoral degrees (e.g., the University of Connecticut). They range from among the oldest and most historic campuses in the country (Yale) to those granting only external degrees (Charter Oak College).

The libraries at these colleges range in size from a few thousand to several million volumes. Their collections include a wide variety of print and non-print materials, from books, magazines and newspapers, and government documents to videotapes, microfiche, and electronic databases. All offer access to the Internet and a full range of resources on the world wide web.

Professionally trained staff in each academic library provide an extensive array of services to their users. Most are open to the general public for at least in-library use of their collections, and many extend borrowing privileges to members of their local communities.

Here are some of the many things which Academic Libraries and Librarians can do:

- Academic libraries and librarians develop collections of materials which meet the needs of a diverse student population and of other library users including faculty and those doing research in special areas.

- These collections primarily support the curriculum of each institution and help prepare students to enter the professional work force of the state and/or to advance their careers.

- From two-year colleges to graduate schools, these collections also help students who are retraining for any of the five career changes which the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the average citizen will make in a working lifetime.

- Materials held typically include: books; government documents, both state and federal; graduate theses and dissertations; periodicals (magazines, journals, and newspapers); audiovisual (AV) materials in all formats; and microfilm and microfiche.

- Provide resources to assist beginning students who are deficient in basic skills, or who are learning English as a second language, to succeed in college-level work.

- Include special collections in subject areas of local interest, such as archives of primary source materials for local history and museum artifacts.

- Academic libraries and librarians distribute information to faculty about new materials available in their subject areas for possible library acquisition. Students are thus assured of adequate access to the latest literature in their fields.

- Academic libraries and librarians build and maintain facilities which support a wide range of instructional activities and community service programs.
Academic libraries devote most of their space to storage of their collections and to making their contents accessible through computers at various locations inside and outside the library.

The library computers usually offer:
- catalogs of materials held by the college’s own library and others;
- periodical databases which contain the full text as well as abstracts of the articles which they index;
- World Wide Web sites on the Internet;
- and word processing and other application software.

Academic libraries allocate additional space for individual and group study, for use of audiovisual materials and electronic resources, and for self-paced learning.

In many cases, academic library staff manage campus-wide instructional media, or AV, services and facilities, such as darkrooms, television production studios, and satellite downlink and teleconference services.

Academic libraries often include space for lectures and other cultural presentations which are often open to the general public.

In collaboration with campus Information Technology (IT) staff, academic librarians often manage local area networks (LANs) and/or wide area networks (WANs) as needed by library users for ease of access to electronic resources.

Academic libraries and librarians provide a full range of information services to students, faculty, and community users:

Academic librarians offer many forms of instruction, ranging from class orientation sessions and semester-length courses to one-on-one consultation, to students and faculty in the use of library materials for research in various disciplines.

Librarians teach information skills to students through class instruction sessions, each an hour long or more, for courses which require students to complete a research assignment. The goal of these efforts is to train lifelong learners who are information literate.

Academic librarians answer reference questions at all levels of depth and complexity for library users ranging from community college students to graduate school professors. This process may happen in person at a library reference desk, on the telephone, or by email.

Academic library staff instruct faculty and students in the proper use of AV and computer technology available through their libraries, or Learning Resource Centers (LRCs).

Staff in academic libraries may also schedule and distribute AV materials and equipment housed in the library or LRC as needed for classroom or off-campus use. Much off-campus use is by or for external organizations in the local community.

Academic librarians offer guidance for searching various sites on the Internet and other online databases. As more and more web sites of variable quality appear online, the skills of a trained librarian become ever more valuable to library patrons in finding useful and reliable information.

Librarians provide support needed by students in distance learning programs or in online courses which are delivered primarily over the Internet. This support may range from online reference service to contract arrangements with off-site libraries to make their collections available to students living near them.
Connecticut Library Association

What Exactly Can Libraries Do?

⇒ Academic libraries and librarians share their resources with other libraries and community organizations:

⇒ Academic librarians borrow materials from other libraries on interlibrary loan (ILL) as needed for the use of college library patrons. In the past year, academic libraries in Connecticut borrowed 30,763 items from other Connecticut libraries and over 35,000 more items from libraries outside the state.

⇒ College librarians also lend materials on ILL to other libraries, often public, school, or corporate libraries, for the use of their patrons. In the past year, academic libraries in Connecticut loaned 45,776 items to other Connecticut libraries and almost 90,000 more items to libraries outside the state.

⇒ Larger college libraries may have a whole department of staff who exclusively do ILL work, which often takes place across national borders through catalogs accessed over the Internet. But even in the smallest academic libraries, ILL service vastly expands access on their own campus to information needed by students and faculty.

⇒ Academic libraries participate in reciprocal borrowing agreements with other libraries to increase ILL access to their own and other library collections.

⇒ Academic libraries publish union catalogs as needed to facilitate access to their collections. These catalogs list similar materials, such as periodicals, which are held by multiple libraries in a given area.

⇒ Academic librarians participate in library automation networks for joint planning of improved mutual access for patrons of all member libraries.

⇒ Academic libraries maintain ongoing contact, through library advisory committees, alumni associations, and/or library friends groups, with local and regional employers to keep informed of work force training resources needed by the larger community which their colleges serve.

⇒ Academic libraries publish or produce a variety of materials to meet the teaching and learning needs of faculty and students:

⇒ Academic librarians prepare bibliographies, “pathfinders,” study guides, workbooks, and other handouts to facilitate access to library resources by all of their users.

⇒ Academic librarians design, develop, and maintain web pages to organize Internet and other electronic resources for library users. Some academic librarians even serve as webmasters for their colleges.

⇒ Academic librarians collaborate with appropriate faculty members to design and produce instructional materials for classroom and/or in-library use. These materials include more and more distance learning, or online, courses which are distributed over the Internet to accommodate students with hectic schedules and/or at remote locations from their home campus.

⇒ Academic library AV staff produce a variety of other material, such as video and audio tapes, as needed for instructional and/or community use.

Academic librarians conduct and publish research about library-related issues in scholarly publications. This kind of research not only advances knowledge in the field of higher learning but helps to improve the education of current students.
WHAT EXACTLY CAN LIBRARIES DO?

Special Libraries

Special librarians are information resource experts dedicated to putting knowledge to work to attain the goals of their organizations. They are employed most frequently by corporations, private businesses, government agencies, museums, colleges, hospitals, associations, and information management consulting firms.

Adding Value to Information: Today’s special librarians do far more than locate and collect data. Using the Internet and other current technology, they also evaluate, analyze, organize, package, and present information in a way that maximizes its usefulness.

A few examples of the diverse services that special librarians may perform include:

- Preparing research reports in response to staff requests for specific information;
- Gathering competitive intelligence;
- Identifying research done at other organizations to avoid unnecessary duplication;
- Verifying facts for external and internal reports and publications;
- Creating databases for organizations to access their internal information;
- Searching patents and trademarks;
- Evaluating and comparing information software and sources of data prior to purchase; and
- Training other staff to efficiently and cost-effectively use online databases.

Special libraries save money. Extensive research has shown that special libraries are likely to save several times their cost of operation by reducing the time that employees have to spend to acquire needed information. That’s time that can be spent on the employees’ primary duties.

Research also was done regarding to what extent special libraries can save staff time. Approximately two-thirds of the executives and managers surveyed at five large corporations felt that the information supplied by special libraries helped them avoid wasting their own time and other people’s time.

Seven Good Reasons To Use A Special Library

1. You will get valuable information to help you make decisions. In a study at five corporations, 80 percent of the executives and managers felt that the information provided by their special librarians helped them choose a course of action.

2. You will make better decisions. In the same study, 75 percent of the executives felt the information helped them avoid making a poor decision.

3. You will save time. In the same study, approximately two-thirds of the respondents felt that the information supplied by their special library helped them avoid wasting their own time and other people’s time.

4. You will be more productive. By taking advantage of the library’s services, you will be able to devote your time to your primary job instead of to obtaining needed information. At one medium-sized company, the professional staff members estimated that they each would have to spend an average of 94 hours a year information-gathering if there were no library.

5. You will get your work done. In a survey at one company, 90 percent of the respondents reported that their visits to the library were helpful in accomplishing the work task for which they went to the library. And 40 percent stated they couldn’t have done their work without using the library.
6. **You will do better work.** In studies at numerous organizations, including several Fortune 100 companies, more than half of the employees surveyed reported that library-provided information resulted in improved work.

7. **You might even become a “fast-tracker.”** In one study, specific employees were identified as achievers because they received special awards or had been selected to serve on important committees and problem-solving teams. On average, these achievers used their special library more frequently than did their non-achieving peers.

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**In the information age, special librarians are essential — they provide the information edge** for the knowledge-based organization by responding with a sense of urgency to critical information needs. In order to fulfill this key role, special librarians require two main types of competencies:

**Professional Competencies relate to the special librarian’s knowledge** in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management and research, and the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services.

**Personal Competencies represent a set of skills, attitudes and values** that enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work.

**Professional Competencies**

The Special Librarian has **expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them.** The information professional:

» **Evaluates** print, CD-ROM and online versions of databases;
» **Knows “the best”** textbooks, journals and electronic resources in specific areas such as biology, marketing and accounting;

» **Selects what is relevant** and usable for the customer;
» **Uses strategic thinking** to perform information selection and analysis that meets specific organizational goals.

The Special Librarian has **specialized subject knowledge appropriate to the business of the organization or client.** In addition to a Masters degree in library and information studies, **many special librarians have subject degrees at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.** Librarians frequently take additional courses in finance, management or other subjects related to their host organization. The librarian monitors and scans the organization’s area of business by reading core journals and other key sources. This enables the development of in-depth, subject specialty information services, including current awareness.

The Special Librarian **develops and manages convenient, accessible and cost-effective information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization.** The information professional:

» **Develops a strategic plan** linked to the business goals of the organization;
» **Sets up effective management,** supervision and budget processes;
» **Builds an effective information services staff**;
» **Obtains documents** in print or electronic form;
» **Builds a core collection**;
» **Analyzes and synthesizes information**;
» **Develops specialized lists of indexing terms** for databases.

The Special Librarian **provides excellent instruction and support for users.** The information professional:

» **Teaches Internet courses** for employees;
» **Develops specialized searching courses** on information resources related to current business goals;
What Exactly Can Libraries Do?

- Keeps up to date with the latest training and instructional techniques;
- Provides troubleshooting service for employees who are using information services from the desktop;
- Provides online reference and assistance.

The Special Librarian develops specialized information products for use inside or outside the organization or by individual clients. The information professional:
- Creates databases of in-house documents such as reports, technical manuals or resource materials used for special projects;
- Creates searchable full-text document files;
- Makes available online technical manuals;
- Creates a home page on the World Wide Web;
- Links the home page to other sites of interest on the Internet;
- Participates in knowledge management activities that create, capture, exchange, use and communicate the organization’s intellectual capital.

The Special Librarian continually improves services in response to changing needs. The information professional:
- Monitors industry trends and disseminates information to key people in the organization or to individual clients;
- Refocuses information services on new business needs;
- Uses just-in-time document delivery to retain maximum flexibility;
- Monitors purchases of information products by departments to ensure that they are cost-effective and aligned with current business needs.

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Personal Competencies

The Special Librarian seeks out challenges and sees new opportunities both inside and outside the library. The information professional:
- Takes on new roles in the organization that require an information leader;
- Uses library-based knowledge and skills to solve a variety of information problems in a wide range of settings;
- Expands the library collection beyond traditional media such as books and journals;
- Creates the library without walls.

The Special Librarian sees the big picture. The information professional:
- Recognizes that information-seeking and use are part of the creative process for individuals and organizations;
- Sees the library and its information services as part of the bigger process of making informed decisions;
- Gives the highest priority to urgent demands for information that are critical to the organization’s competitive advantage;
- Monitors major business trends and world events;
- Anticipates trends and pro-actively realigns library and information services to take advantage of them.

The Special Librarian looks for partnerships and alliances. The information professional:
- Seeks alliances with management information systems (MIS) professionals to optimize complementary knowledge and skills;
- Provides leadership on the information management team;
- Forms partnerships with other libraries or information services inside or outside the organization to optimize resource sharing;
- Seeks alliances with database vendors and other information providers to improve products and services;
- Seeks alliances with researchers in faculties of library and information studies to conduct relevant and practical studies.

The Special Librarian has effective communications skills. The information professional:
- Listens first and then coaches staff and others to develop their own solutions;
- Supports and participates in mentorship programs and succession planning;
- Runs meetings effectively;
- Presents ideas clearly and enthusiastically;
- Writes clear and understandable text;
- Uses plain language;
- Requests feedback on communications skills and uses it for self-improvement.
The Special Librarian provides leadership. The information professional:
- **Learns about and cultivates the qualities of a good leader** and knows when to exercise leadership;
- **Can share leadership** with others and allow others to take the leadership role;
- **Exercises leadership** within the library and as a member of other teams or units within the organization;
- **Seeks opportunities for leadership** in the profession;
- **Acknowledges the contribution of all members of the team.**

The Special Librarian plans, prioritizes and focuses on what is critical. The information professional:
- **Recognizes that**, in order to use resources most effectively, **ongoing careful planning is required**;
- **Develops an approach to planning and time management** that incorporates a balance of personal and professional goals;
- **Reviews goals on a regular basis**, prioritizes the demand makes sure that an appropriate proportion of daily activities are related to the most critical personal and professional goals;
- **Mentors others** to do the same.

The Special Librarian is committed to lifelong learning and personal career planning. The information professional:
- **Is committed to a career that involves ongoing learning and knowledge development**;
- **Takes personal responsibility** for long-term career planning and seeks opportunities for learning and enrichment;
- **Advocates for a work environment that encourages and supports ongoing knowledge development** and that values the contribution of people;
- **Maintains a strong sense of self-worth** based on the achievement of a balanced set of evolving personal and professional goals.

The Special Librarian has personal business skills and creates new opportunities. The information professional:
- **Recognizes that**, in the changing world of work, entrepreneurship and the ability to function as a professional in a small business are essential skills;
- **Seeks out opportunities to develop these skills**;
- **Is willing to take employment in a variety of forms** including full-time, contract and project work;
- **Uses the entrepreneurial spirit** in the organizational environment to revitalize products and services.

The Special Librarian is flexible and positive in a time of continuing change. The information professional:
- **Is willing to take on different responsibilities** at different points in time and to respond to changing need;
- **Maintains a positive attitude** and helps others to do the same;
- **Never says it cannot be done**;
- **Looks for solutions**;
- **Helps others to develop their ideas** by providing the right information;
- **Is always on the lookout for new ideas**;
- **Sees and uses technology as an enabler of new information** ideas, products and services.