

“Looking for Pictures of Clouds”: Defining the Unique Research Needs of Creative Communities

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The purpose of this study is to define the unique research needs of creative communities as seen by the academic librarians supporting those communities. After surveying academic librarians, visual practice, information relating to the practice of a creative discipline, and inspiration were identified as unique research needs of these populations. Survey respondents also identified challenges to serving creative communities, including perceptions of library relevance, buy-in, and scheduling. While past literature has engaged with supporting specific creative disciplines, this study focuses on the collective research needs of creative communities.

Introduction

Academic librarians tell stories about the needs of the communities they serve—critical resources, certain types of digital project support, instruction for the same course every semester, and other needs. This was true for the three authors, who have worked with varying types of creative communities in three different institutions: creative writers, theater professionals, graphic designers, musicians, acting students, dancers, visual artists, and students in a wide-ranging “interdisciplinary arts” program. All three authors had previously looked to the literature, searching for examples and ideas related to supporting creative communities, and found that comparatively little has been written that ties together the information needs of different arts populations. Separately, and in conversation, they wondered whether this gap meant that the challenges and particular features of the creative communities they worked with were isolated incidents. It is easy to tell a story about the needs of a specific community informed by institutional or geographic context or the challenges of supporting artists in a particular form. It is much more challenging to broaden the scope of this story into one that encompasses multiple disciplines, modes, and contexts—but, in doing so, the authors hope to tease out commonalities across creative communities and to provide the librarians who work with these communities with both solidarity and suggestions about how to continue supporting these groups. The purpose of this study is to define the unique research needs of creative communities as seen by the academic librarians who support those communities. Simultaneously, the authors wanted to investigate what challenges academic librarians encounter when work-

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ing with these communities. There is a clear need to knit together the similarities discussed below and develop applicable suggestions for academic librarians who work with multiple, or interdisciplinary, creative communities.

Literature Review

In examining the literature related to this question, the authors identified three recurring themes: the research needs and preferences of creative communities, common challenges in serving patron populations, and specific approaches to serving creative communities. In each case, the authors found that studies had either explored specific disciplines or had addressed research and information literacy more broadly. Examining the literature about specific creative disciplines reveals similarities between the research needs of practitioners in those disciplines, some of which are explored below.

Needs and Preferences of Creative Communities

Many scholars have investigated the needs and preferences of students and scholars working in specific creative arts. A number of studies have identified inspiration as a key information need for individual creative practitioners.¹ In 2010, Ann Medaille found that “artists may find inspiration during the process of searching for information, when they find an image, a fact, a story, a piece of music, or (most likely) an unspecified combination of all of the above.”² Although artists and creative practitioners may not develop traditional research papers, they depend on research to inspire their works.

Research by creative practitioners is not necessarily limited to their discipline. Several studies have noted the interdisciplinary needs of specific creative disciplines, and how they are impacted by the availability of materials covering a broad range of disciplines.³ Jennifer Mayer found that dance students “noted the importance of interdisciplinary research in the field of dance and listed the following areas: medical information, kinesiology, social issues in dance, music, pedagogy, emotional and psychological health of dancers, body image, and visual images.”⁴ This wide array of topics highlights the need for creative practitioners to explore the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts of their work.⁵ Archival and special collections can help researchers to explore these contexts.⁶ As Lisa Lazar writes, “historical society libraries and archives offer unique materials and types of collections not readily available elsewhere.”⁷

Generally, studies have found a preference for digital materials in some formats, including streaming video, streaming audio, and electronic journals. However, a strong preference for print materials was noted in a number of cases, particularly for visual sources and musical scores.⁸ Cathy Goodwin found that the work of a costume designer, for instance, depended heavily on “books on costume history with images of clothing from a particular era.”⁹ E-books might not always contain the images available in print materials, or they may contain images of a lesser quality or resolution.

Challenges to Serving Creative Communities

Across subject specialties, academic librarians have identified several common challenges in serving creative communities. Communication about library services and buy-in to library services are frequently noted as difficulties. Scott Bennet highlights the challenge of differing priorities between faculty and library workers, which result in “a campus environment that, although rarely hostile, is often uninformed, indifferent, or [otherwise] occupied.”¹⁰ Faculty

prefer to focus on delivering content in their own areas of expertise and may not be moved by appeals to broader curricular or pedagogical goals that often accompany library instruction and information literacy work.¹¹ Choosing to frame library collaborations in terms of direct, disciplinary impact may be a strategic way to make inroads.¹² Interviews with Irish faculty conducted by Claire McGuinness in 2006 identify a perception that developing information literacy skills is a “natural, almost intuitive process” that students will develop on their own.¹³ Nicole Pagowsky and Erica DeFrain suggest that students may base their own interactions with librarians on the interactions modeled by faculty. In this way, faculty may serve as unintentional gatekeepers or barriers to library services.¹⁴

These challenges may be addressed through outreach, new communication strategies, or increased staffing. However, all these solutions come with added costs, which may be impractical given the financial instability of many academic libraries. Indeed, a lack of financial resources creates other personnel or “role-related” challenges, such as the role-related stress and role overload described by Ellen Shupe, Stephanie Wambaugh, and Reed Bramble, whose 2015 study compared academic librarians’ level of stress, burnout, and job satisfaction to other professions.¹⁵ It is possible to connect some causes of role-related stress and overload to the 2008 recession, which led many libraries to provide “more services with a combination of less staff, reduced hours, and less funding.”¹⁶

Approaches to Serving Creative Communities

Some librarians frame library services and resources using a disciplinary or professional standard that appeals to their user populations.¹⁷ Whether or not a disciplinary framework is referenced, the vast majority of documented approaches to working with creative communities are bound by some disciplinary or curricular parameters. This has documented advantages and disadvantages. Writing about studio art populations, Leo Appleton, Gustavo Grandal Montero, and Abigail Jones describe the value of library instruction and activities that allow “students to see the library staff differently, as staff who work collaboratively with [faculty], who input into the curriculum and who have real life stories to share about their subject matter.”¹⁸ Kasia Leousis also identifies the benefit of librarians practicing or displaying disciplinary knowledge, such as feeling comfortable critiquing and discussing artwork.¹⁹ While these disciplinary approaches are very common, they may be at odds with the very interdisciplinary research needs of many creative communities.²⁰

Some successful approaches to supporting creative communities involve one or more librarians deeply embedding within one course, program, or department. Kristina Keough and Stephen Patton describe several models for librarians to support digital scholarship created by artists.²¹ Some collaborations, like the one described by Kathleen Abromeit and Victoria Vaughan, are made possible by grant funding, highlighting the human and financial resources necessary for this kind of work.²²

Since the adoption of the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework)* in 2015, many academic librarians who work or liaise with creative communities across the disciplines have used the *Framework* to argue for more robust support of creative populations by academic libraries and librarians.²³ As previously noted, much of this research has been situated within the disciplines, particularly visual art, design, and music.

Many scholars have demonstrated how librarians can use the *Framework* to support the information and research needs of creative communities.²⁴ However, Sarah Carter, Heather

Koopmans, and Alice Whiteside argue that, while the *Framework* fits contemporary research contexts more effectively than the 2001 *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, it fails to fully acknowledge creative works as scholarship.²⁵ Using the context of indigenous art, Alexander Watkins provides nuanced examples of how to engage with the “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” Frame. His work offers a critique of the *Framework* while also drawing on it as a way to open up a conversation about authority and information sources with fellow instructors and students.²⁶

Methods

The authors designed a 14-question exploratory survey with a combination of closed- and open-ended questions to investigate the current relationship between academic librarians and creative communities. The survey consisted of four sections: library and librarian demographic information, perceptions of creative communities, how librarians interact with creative communities, and the challenges of serving these communities. (For a complete list of questions, see appendix A.)

The survey was approved by the University of Washington IRB, after which it was distributed on a variety of library listservs. (For a list of listservs, see appendix B.) The survey was open for 45 days, from January to March 2019. Halfway through the 45-day period, the authors sent out a reminder to the same set of listservs. In all, 131 responses were recorded.

Coding of Responses

After an initial review of the data, the authors chose to focus on coding and analyzing responses to specific questions. This decision was motivated by a desire to maintain a manageable project scope. In future research, the authors plan to return to other sections of the survey data. Along with the demographic information collected about librarian roles and the libraries they work in, the authors chose two open-ended questions to examine, listed below:

“Do you think that creative communities have unique research needs? If so, describe them. If not, why?”

“What obstacles or challenges do you encounter/have you encountered when working with these groups [creative communities]?”

Each author read one third of the responses and made a list of recurring themes. As described by Graham Gibbs, the authors used a strategy of “data-driven coding,” which involves using the existing data to develop a list of codes rather than approaching a set of data with pre-identified codes.²⁷ The authors then compared the three lists and identified commonalities and differences. They counted the number of recurrences for each code to identify the most common themes across the entire list of responses. The authors combined the most common codes from the three lists into one final list and created shared definitions for each code. Then the authors embarked on three rounds of norming, which required some revisions of the code definitions. Once the norming process was complete, each of the authors read one third of the responses and applied the codes. In addition to this coding, the authors tabulated responses from specific questions in the demographics section (see Survey Results) to generate a clearer profile of the survey respondents.

Survey Results

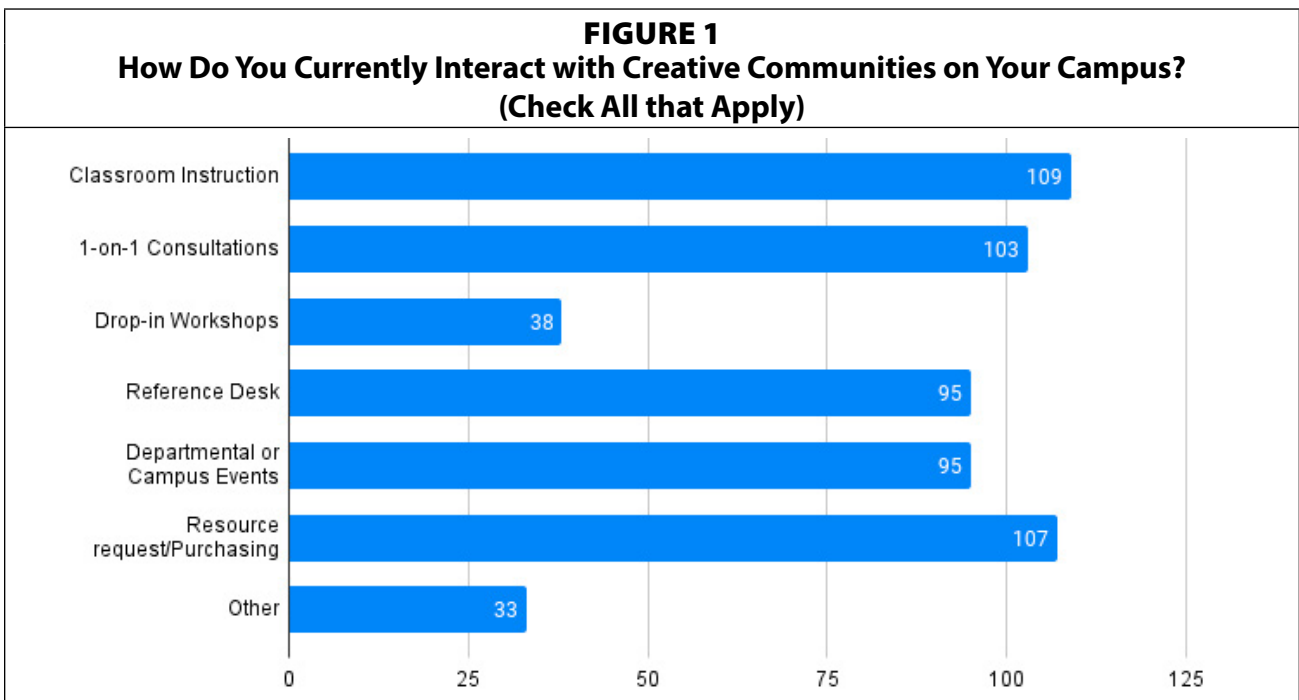
The survey received 131 responses. The majority (58.8%) of respondents identified themselves as early career (five years or fewer in professional positions), and 41.2 percent of respondents identified themselves as mid- and late career (more than five years in professional positions). A wide range of institutional sizes was represented, from FTE of under 1,000 to FTE of over 20,000. More than half (56.2%) of responses came from individuals working at institutions granting doctoral degrees.

Overwhelmingly, respondents identified as liaison librarians (86%). Of those who did not identify as liaisons, some did not have those responsibilities as part of their current positions, while others worked at institutions that did not use a liaison model.

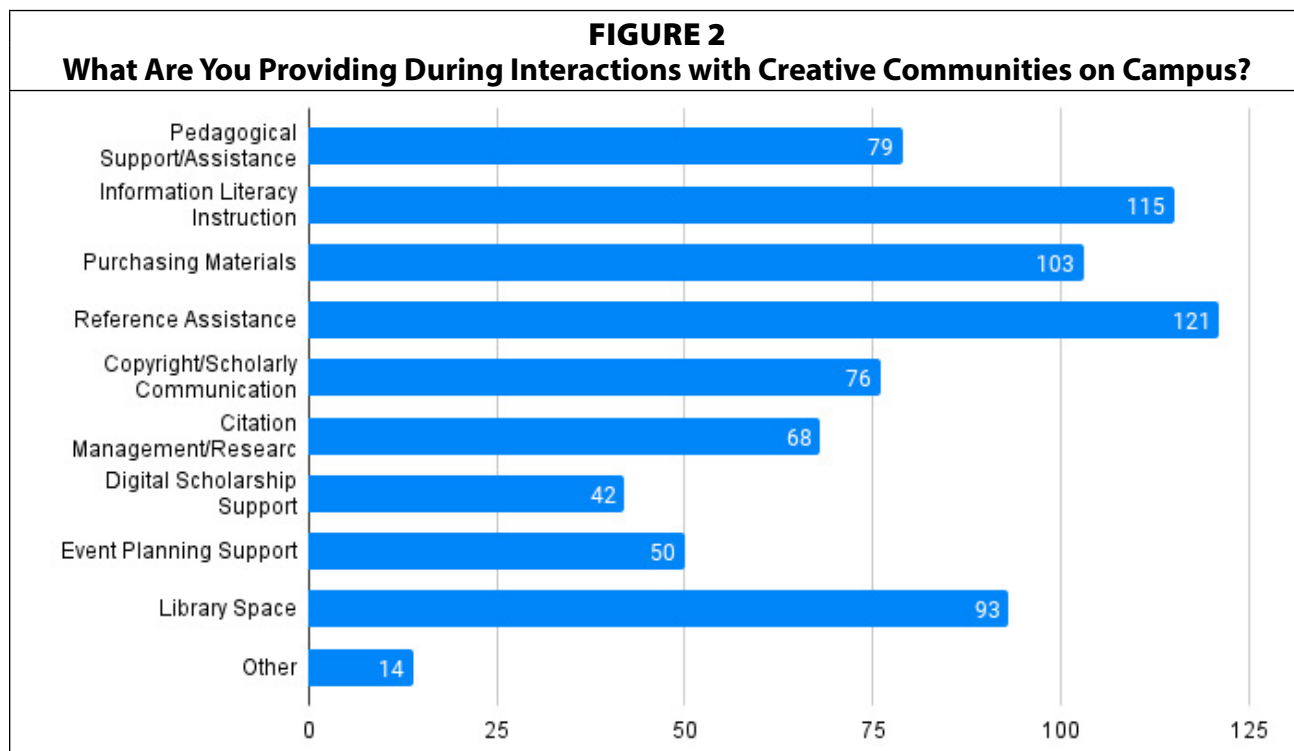
The survey asked, “How do you currently interact with creative communities on your campus? Check all that apply,” and provided six options, with the additional option to write in other answers. In the chart below, the top six responses were provided in the survey. The majority of the respondents selected one or more of these options. Write-in responses ranged from embedded or integrated class partnerships to library tours and exhibits (see appendix D for a complete list).

TABLE 1
Most Common Departments/Units Served

Department or Unit	Number of Responses
Art (including studio art and art history)	66
Design (including video game, graphic, interior, fashion, and others)	51
Theater/Theatre	49
Music	39
History	32
Dance	31
English	25



The survey asked, as a follow-up, “What are you providing during these interactions?” and provided nine options, with the additional option to write in other answers. Again, most respondents chose from among the options provided in the survey.



As described in the Methods section above, the authors assigned codes to the responses of specific survey questions. In the charts below, see the total code counts. Definitions for each code can be found in appendix C.

TABLE 2 Coding of Creative Community Needs	
Code Name	Total Count
Information Relating to Practice	39
Support for Visual Practice	38
Inspiration	23
Interdisciplinary	16
Research Context	16
Primary Sources, Archives, or Special Collections	12
Browsing	9
Scholarly Communication	9
"Core" Information Literacy Skills	8
No	4
Timing	2

TABLE 3 Coding of Librarian Challenges	
Code Name	Total Count
No Challenges	8
Lack of relevance	34
Buy-in	21
Copyright/Content	3
Lack of Resources	15
Silos	13
Population Needs and Preferences	15
Scope of Job	5
Scheduling	22
Project Management	2

Discussion

Librarians who work with creative communities largely agree that those communities do have unique research needs and preferences. In their analysis of survey responses, the authors identified three primary research needs to explore. These three needs—support for visual practice, information related to practice, and inspiration—provide an opportunity to explore some distinctive features of creative research. Similarly, several shared challenges appeared in the survey: lack of relevance, lack of buy-in, lack of resources, and scheduling. These challenges, while acute for librarians working with creative communities, are also representative of the challenges faced by academic librarians.

Support for Visual Practice

The idea of “support for visual practice” as a research need was identified by 38 survey respondents, or roughly one third. The authors defined support for visual practice as: “Nontextual and/or image-based materials. Visual literacy skills. Final research output that is visual in nature.” In some ways, the idea that creative communities need support to find and create nontextual materials is low-hanging fruit. Many artistic endeavors are intrinsically visual—film, studio art, modern dance, and the like. Indeed, it may even be surprising that only about a third of respondents identified some kind of visual research need.

The majority of survey responses that the authors tagged as support for visual practice were referring either to materials needed or to the output of someone’s research or practice. While “visual literacy” is a concept that underpins many of these activities, it was only explicitly identified by two respondents. This is interesting because visual literacy is well represented in the library literature concerning arts disciplines, yet it was not identified by librarians in this study as a unique need of this population.²⁸ In a survey of academic librarians from 2018, a majority of respondents indicated that visual literacy was important for many disciplines, but more than half were not incorporating it into their instructional practices in any way. A significant percentage of librarians may still perceive visual literacy as a skill best, or required to be, taught by instructors of record.²⁹

For many creative communities, frequent engagement with an art form or practice is essential to growth and success. The library is in a prime position to facilitate that engagement through collections:

one of our art professors told a class on a library visit “whenever you aren’t making art, you should be looking at art.” Our art magazines are particularly popular for discovering new artists and students and staff regularly check out books on artists/topics/genres/techniques etc....they are interested in to learn more and get inspiration.

As creative communities search for and interact with visual materials, librarians are in the position to note the material types and themes that are most in demand. In turn, these observations can be translated into more informed decisions about purchasing and outreach. However, both the survey and the authors’ review of relevant literature shows that library tools and organizational structures can prohibit creative communities from successfully using visual materials:

Many [students] are building their visual vocabulary; looking for inspiration for a set design; designing clothing; comparing/contrasting fonts and layouts; etc. It is the visual nature of our book collection that attracts them. A former VP of the library division tried to decree that eBooks only would be purchased. Informed him that one cannot compare/contrast seams/fonts/interiors/etc. with eBooks but it can be done with printed material.

In some scenarios, it is not just the content of library collections, but the physicality and tactile engagement that matters. Data about usage may tell librarians that certain items are popular, but it may not be able to communicate precisely *why* they are popular. This is one example of how physical libraries can still be core sites of experiential learning.

Respondents also highlighted other challenges for those seeking to find and use visual materials:

Creative individuals tend to work much more with images, other visual media, and tactile materials. They also have different needs, using research as inspiration, for example. Their browsing patterns are different as well; many prefer visual-based searching as opposed to traditional text-based search engines.

These issues related to visual practice vary greatly in both scale and addressability. It is unlikely that, as a field, academic librarians will shift away from the Library of Congress classification system, or that we will soon be able to comprehensively engage with the way that materials are distributed. However, these challenges do point toward tangible actions that librarians can take to support creative communities' information needs. Some possible actions include: making the licensing details of library-owned and subscription resources more visible; pulling together recommended open access/free collections of visual materials by theme, format, or discipline; and identifying departmental partners who may help seek institutional or grant funding for digitization or preservation efforts. None of these are quick fixes, but they do address some of the challenges born of working in highly visual forms.

Information Relating to Practice

"Information relating to practice" refers to the idea that people engaging in creative endeavors need information specific to the practice of their craft. This code was drawn directly from a participant's survey response: "Yes. They [creative communities] need information relating to practice." During the coding process, the authors continued to see responses that referred to this need for information related to practice and developed this definition: "Information relating to the practice of the creative activity. Nonacademic sources. Technical know-how. Accepted norms. Experiential research." This definition is multifaceted and includes specific information about craft that could be nonacademic or technical in nature, that focuses on accepted norms within a creative practice, or that is related to professionalization. As this survey response explains:

Often members of the creative community I serve need practical, day-to-day resources about professionalism, locating jobs, staying physically and emotionally

healthy, running a business, negotiating contracts, copyright, etc. These areas are not necessarily common to academic research of other kinds. Other, less “practical” resources may provide inspiration or examples of creative activity outside of the particular creative area—other arts, literature, philosophy, etc.

This quote illustrates the very specific ways that librarians see creative practitioners and communities having the need for information related to practice. However, academic libraries are often organized to collect and focus on scholarly information and scholarly outputs of their users. This means that there may be an internal disconnect in academic libraries between what librarians know users need and how the academic libraries are organized, maintained, and promoted.

The idea that academic librarians need to display or possess some disciplinary knowledge also comes into play when discussing information relating to practice. Many of the librarians writing about working with creative communities situate themselves within those communities, often through the lens of an academic discipline.³⁰ Many respondents gave specific examples describing the kinds of nonacademic information creative communities need. It is clear that academic librarians facilitate access and discovery of both scholarly and nonscholarly information for creative communities. It may be possible to facilitate opportunities to share information related to practice in more informal, relational ways. For example, supporting or hosting speakers and/or artists in residence, which would allow for informational exchange between practitioners.

Currently, academic libraries are primarily positioned as locations (either physical or digital) of scholarly information. Beyond collections and resources, this has implications for the way academic librarians approach teaching information literacy because the *Framework* “still privileges traditional forms of scholarship.”³¹ Because academic libraries’ resources and services are structured around scholarly information, creative communities may not see academic libraries as relevant to their information needs. The relevance of academic libraries to creative communities was identified by participants as a major challenge and is discussed further in the “Challenges to Serving Creative Communities” section below.

Inspiration

“Inspiration” was identified as a research need of creative communities by 23 respondents. The authors developed the following definition of inspiration during coding: “Library resources and spaces as a source of artistic or creative inspiration. Seeking out information as a tool for inspiration.” Inspiration is inherently interconnected with the concepts of browsing and interdisciplinarity. The Frame “Scholarship as Conversation” applies just as much to creative work as it does to research with outputs traditionally valued more highly by the academy. Survey respondents agreed that creative research is as much a “conversation” as work in more traditionally academic disciplines. Students on their campuses took part in scholarly conversations and relied on library resources to inform and inspire their own work:

Like sometimes to understand a character’s motive, it helps to read about what it was like to live during that time period. Or a creative writing person needs help finding out specific facts and dates for a book that she is working on. Sometimes they are just looking for creative inspiration, like they want to look at art books

and photo collections to get inspired for how a set might look. They may end up using unusual sources or need a lot of different things to look at.

This response identifies browsing behavior, which nine respondents identified as a research need. During coding, the authors defined “browsing” as: “Idea of ‘serendipity.’ Benefits of browsing vs. doing directed searching, often related to the idea that browsing is more difficult in online information environments.” Survey respondents agreed that browsing assisted students in finding inspiration:

Yes—I think the browse experience is especially important for creative work (it enables creative collaging of serendipitous information finds).

Interdisciplinary research needs, which the authors defined as “Mentions the cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary nature of creative research. The need to combine resources to create a holistic answer,” were frequently referred to by respondents as well. Sixteen respondents identified interdisciplinarity as key to creative research:

Yes because the range of topics is so wide. A theatre major might need sources on Renaissance costumes one semester and on flapper fashions the next semester. Their research is interdisciplinary, and their research needs are unpredictable.

Creative communities conducting research depend on their ability to browse for information that might spark inspiration, and their research is not necessarily restricted to their own fields. How do libraries facilitate browsing for inspiration? Survey respondents suggested that creative research may be stymied, rather than assisted, by library organizational structures and strictures:

Yes... often they are searching for inspiration or examples of work similar to what they are trying to accomplish. Sometimes what they are searching for is impossible to find using traditional library tools such as keywords, subject headings, browsing, etc. For example, they might be looking for artwork that deals with a particular theme, but that theme might be vague/broad and not searchable.

Libraries can use the connections between inspiration, browsing, and the interdisciplinarity of creative research to develop more effective services. As noted above, academic libraries are unlikely to shift away from Library of Congress classification. In the face of such institutional constraints, there are no easy answers to the challenges surrounding the facilitation of browsing and inspiration. Librarians might gain familiarity with the disciplines creative practitioners are likely to draw on, through informal exploration or seeking out more formal training. Brainstorming is often addressed in library instruction sessions and consultations as part of the research process, but it is less common to address inspiration and the creative exploration that generates new ideas. Being more explicit about the function of inspiration in the research process could benefit creative communities and students in other disciplines. These potential solutions are not simple, but the needs of a significant population of library

users should not go unmet. Some solutions, like improving the context and detail of catalog records, point to an opportunity for increased collaboration between public services and technical services librarians.

Challenges to Serving Creative Communities

The challenges and obstacles cited by survey respondents clustered strongly around four themes: lack of relevance, lack of buy-in, lack of resources, and scheduling. These challenges are interconnected, making it important to discuss them collectively. Population needs and preferences was an additional challenge identified by respondents; but, because this challenge aligns with the unique research needs and preferences, it is discussed in the section above.

The most common challenge identified by librarians in this survey was “lack of relevance.” Through coding, the authors defined lack of relevance as “the library and library resources are perceived to lack relevance to the work of a creative community, or the library is not regarded as being interested in supporting creative work.” This code captures a persistent theme in the responses, that the work of librarians and libraries in relation to creative communities is unseen and misunderstood:

Creative practitioners don’t always recognize what they do as research—they often just consider it part of their practice—so it can be difficult for some faculty to see the relevance of the library.

The ways in which creative communities discuss their information use is also part of this relevance disconnect. The response above showcases the issues involved with this challenge, from conceptions of what research is to communicating how the library can support those engaging in creative endeavors.

Beyond library relevance is the problem of “lack of buy-in.” The authors define lack of buy-in as the idea that “faculty and students do not perceive value in devoting time to library resources and services.” While library relevance and lack of buy-in are similar, lack of buy-in describes direct disinterest in the services and resources of academic libraries, even after communication and outreach. Lack of buy-in is particularly concerning when considering the emphasis on strong partnerships described in the literature.³² The responses below showcase the difficulties librarians have getting buy-in:

I think getting buy-in about the value of the library for students. Most people understand it, but it’s a large system, and the relationship building takes time.

Faculty in the creative disciplines often do not perceive a need for our service.

This study, which captured librarian perspectives, indicated that librarians feel underused by creative populations. A potential solution to this challenge is to use this study’s findings about the unique research needs of creative populations to guide future outreach and communication. Since librarians see this population as having unique research needs, it may be possible to address these challenges of perception and buy-in via communication, services, or resources that are grounded in serving these unique needs. For example, libraries could

curate physical or digital thematic collections to provide inspiration. These collections could speak to broader current events or societal issues, or it could be themed in consultation with a specific course or departmental interest. Many libraries already do this work, but explicitly connecting curated displays to creative communities and emphasizing their inspirational function could help deepen the affiliation between libraries and creative communities. Librarians could also focus on identifying venues to communicate about career-focused resources and other “information related to practice.” Capstone or senior thesis courses, departmentally required research methods courses, or cocurricular groups are all possible places to share these resources, depending on your institutional context.

Different strategies are needed to address the challenges of “lack of resources” and “scheduling.” During coding, scheduling was defined as “The librarian’s ability to find time to schedule instruction or events with creative groups.” Librarians repeatedly described scheduling as a major challenge.

They are very busy! Not just academic studies but practicing/perfecting their art forms.

The issue of scheduling may feed into lack of buy-in, as the following responses relate the reluctance of faculty to give class time to librarians as not just a question of value but of having the time to give.

The only obstacles come from faculty not wanting to share class time for information literacy instruction.

It is also possible that scheduling problems are caused by lack of resources, as it is hard to schedule when a library and campus departments are understaffed. Several responses linked scheduling and lack of resources, including funding, together.

Timing is tricky—our creative faculty are so busy and keep hours that are not necessarily 9–5pm. Their tenure demands are extensive, since they often need to produce print research as well as maintain [a] performance program. Our creative disciplines are understaffed for instruction, so it is even more challenging to work together to come up with new ideas for library workshops in their classes.

Lack of resources may refer to information resources, or it may refer to funding. Because our survey recorded responses from librarians at institutions of different sizes, availability of resources and workload vary widely in our survey. Scheduling and lack of resources stem from larger structural challenges related to the fact that “a majority of the libraries have experienced flat or reduced budgets.”³³ Given the current and predicted economic climate, it is likely that lack of resources will be a continuing, and perhaps increasingly challenging, issue. The relationship between the challenges of lack of resources and scheduling should be explored further in relation not only to the work of academic librarians but also the populations they work with, as these systemic challenges are part of the larger landscape of higher education.

If scheduling is a structural issue within higher education where librarians, instructors, and students feel strapped for time because of their required responsibilities, then the challenge of finding time to work with creative communities is not unique to this population. Regardless, further study is needed on how the issue of time impacts partnerships in higher education. Viewing the challenges of scheduling and lack of resources as structural means that, unlike lack of relevance and lack of buy-in, these challenges may not be solvable on the individual librarian level.

Further Research

The authors chose to focus this study specifically on the experiences and observations of academic librarians who work with creative communities. Framing the study this way was productive both because it helped fill an existing gap in the literature about academic liaison services and because it prevented scope creep. A natural continuation of this study would be to survey members of creative communities that are served by academic libraries.

Further work to identify the vocabulary and language used by different creative communities could facilitate more effective outreach. Taking the time to match library services and resources to the information needs of creative communities could be a way to build stronger buy-in and demonstrate value.

This study has illuminated the ways in which building library liaison services around traditional departments or schools has created some structural challenges, especially for creative communities. The liaison model, especially at institutions already experiencing pressure due to lack of resources, may exacerbate previously documented role-related stress and librarian burnout. When a single librarian is made responsible for increasing numbers of students, faculty, or programs, diminishing returns are likely. Further exploration of the tensions between existing patron needs and academic library service design could be informative, but it poses significant challenges. This research could also be expanded beyond creative communities to other groups within academic institutions that do not produce traditional scholarship, such as entrepreneurship programs, community-based learning programs, and applied sciences.

Finally, researchers with an interest in creative communities could investigate maker-spaces and digital media services as sites of librarian engagement with creative activities. In the authors' survey, only three mentions of "makerspace" appeared, and, in all of those mentions, makerspaces were only places that used library *spaces*, rather than an example of deep librarian-community partnerships.

Study Limitations

The authors chose to use the phrase "creative communities" as a collective term for the programs, departments, teams, and individuals that academic librarians might work with. This term refers to people who are engaging in creative endeavors, either alone or collectively. They may be working in one or across several fields or mediums. The phrase "creative communities" was chosen deliberately because it allows for a more expansive scope of creative activity, providing space for commonalities between different types of creative research to emerge. The study's description made reference to populations doing creative work and provided examples including visual art, theater, dance, graphic design, and creative writing.

While the intent of using this phrase was to reach beyond disciplines, many of the questions in the survey primed people to think about disciplines, because of the examples provided.

The use of this phrase was also a response to the fact that many existing studies located by the authors focused on how libraries support the research needs of those engaged in one very specific discipline or another. The authors acknowledge that this decision may have contributed to participant confusion. However, the authors remain committed to this decision, and the survey results indicated that most participants were able to respond.

Conclusion

It is clear that creative communities have unique research and information needs and that they do conduct research, even if it does not always conform to the traditional scholarly outputs. Creative communities engage deeply with a range of materials, often reaching outside their own disciplines and far outside the academy. The research processes that creative communities engage in can challenge the structures of academic libraries, and their unique needs provide a valuable opportunity to reconsider how we organize ourselves, provide services, and structure our physical and digital collections.

It is not the authors' intention to create more work for academic librarians who serve creative communities or to argue for an expansion of scope. Rather, the authors hope to validate the labor of academic librarians who have wondered if their experiences were isolated or singular. Collectively examining the needs of creative communities is important because the services and resources that benefit one particular community may be applicable to supporting other communities as well. So often, library users are working across and outside of disciplines, and our conception of academic libraries must continue to develop in ways that will support them.

APPENDIX A. Survey Questions

1. What is your current job title?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1–3 years
 - c. 3–5 years
 - d. 5–10 years
 - e. More than 10 years
3. What is the size of your institution?
 - a. Fewer than 1,000 FTE
 - b. Between 1,000 and 3,000 FTE
 - c. Between 3,000 and 10,000 FTE
 - d. Between 10,000 and 20,000 FTE
 - e. More than 20,000 FTE
4. What is the highest degree your institution offers?
 - a. Associate
 - b. Bachelor
 - c. Master
 - d. Doctoral
5. Are you a liaison? If yes, which departments or campus units do you serve? For example: visual arts, creative writing, film studies, and so on. Please be as specific as possible.
6. In addition to any departments you serve, what creative communities exist on your campus?
7. Do you see any of these communities using the library? (that is, resources, spaces, services)
8. Do you think that creative communities have unique research needs? If so, describe them. If not, why?
9. How do you currently interact with creative communities on your campus? Check all that apply:
 - a. Classroom instruction
 - b. 1-on-1 consultations
 - c. Drop-in workshops
 - d. Departmental/campus events
 - e. Reference desk
 - f. Resource requests/purchasing
10. What are you providing during these interactions?
 - a. Pedagogical support/assistance with assignment development
 - b. Information literacy instruction
 - c. Purchasing materials
 - d. Reference assistance
 - e. Copyright/scholarly communication support
 - f. Citation management/research data management
 - g. Digital scholarship support
 - h. Event planning support
 - i. Library space
11. Have you done any direct outreach to creative communities on your campus? If so, please describe.

12. What obstacles or challenges do you encounter/have you encountered when working with these groups?
13. Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview, conducted via phone or Google Hangouts? If so, please leave your name and contact information below.
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

APPENDIX B. List of Listservs for Survey Distribution

uls-l@lists.ala.org
ili-l@lists.ala.org
acrl-arts@lists.ala.org
les-l@lists.ala.org
dance@lists.ala.org
lirt-l@lists.ala.org
rusa-l@lists.ala.org
acrl-ir@lists.ala.org
collib-l@lists.ala.org
les-l@lists.ala.org
Acrl-nw

APPENDIX C. Coding Definitions

Needs and Preferences Codes:

Support for Visual Practice: Nontextual and/or image-based materials. Visual literacy skills. Final research output that is visual in nature.

Research Context: Larger context of someone's research needs. How the final product may not fit into a traditional box (that is, scholarly article or monograph publication).

"Core" Information Literacy Skills: Information Literacy skills: the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* or ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*; generally agreed-upon concepts such as synthesis, searching, source evaluation, authority, and the like.

Information Relating to Practice: Information related to the practice of the creative activity. Nonacademic sources. Technical know-how. Accepted norms. Experiential research.

Inspiration: Library resources and spaces as a source of artistic or creative inspiration. Seeking out information as a tool for inspiration.

Interdisciplinarity: Mentions the cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary nature of creative research. The need to combine resources to create a holistic answer.

Browsing: Idea of "serendipity." Benefits of browsing vs. doing directed searching, often related to the idea that browsing is more difficult in online information environments.

Scholarly Communication: Scholarly communication knowledge needs. Knowing how to work with materials that may be under copyright.

No: No, creative communities do not have unique research needs.

Primary Sources, Archives, and Special Collections: Use of archival or special collections materials, and/or primary sources, across formats.

Timing: Unique research needs require more time and/or preparation. Some creative activities may have unusual or compressed timelines.

Challenges Codes:

Lack of relevance: The library and library resources are perceived to lack relevance to the work of a creative community, or the library is not regarded as being interested in supporting creative work.

Lack of buy-in: Faculty and students do not perceive value in devoting time to library resources and services.

Lack of resources: Limited resources (like financial, personnel, time) whether on the part of the librarian or the creative community.

Copyright and content: Faculty and students face scholarly communication and copyright challenges, including fair use and licensing.

Silos: A lack of connections (such as physical proximity, relationships) between the library and its communities of patrons as well as within the library.

Population needs and preferences: Librarian understanding of, and ability to, deliver resources that meet population's needs and preferences.

Scope of job: The limits imposed by restrictions and/or competing demands on a librarian's time.

Scheduling: The librarian's ability to find time to schedule instruction or events with creative groups.

Project management: This population faces challenges in managing their projects.

No Challenges: No challenges are or were encountered.

APPENDIX D

Write-in answers for the survey question “How do you currently interact with creative communities on your campus? Check all that apply”

- Well integrated with art history; a little with art studio; other disciplines very erratic interactions
- Theater classes meet in library classroom
- Theater students practice in library basement
- Library tours
- Studio visits
- Interlibrary loan requests
- Embedded course support in studio
- Spending time embedded in each of these areas
- Looking for opportunities to network and have serendipitous conversations
- Custom tours of the artist archives
- Occasionally perform with one of the student orchestras
- Attend departmental meetings
- Critiques, graduate committees
- Library pop-up
- Serve on committees together
- Co-taught courses; interview new tenure-track faculty
- Studio hours
- I see members of these communities but I’m not their specific liaison
- Exhibits and performances in the library
- Virtual reference
- Regular book displays and topical exhibits
- Course project critiques
- Orientation; library programs collaborating with/hosting the arts
- Circ desk; departmental meetings; and we offer the arts department 2 small gallery areas in the library to use for student and faculty exhibits
- Serve as judge for juried theatre performances
- Circulation
- Ref hours in their lobbies
- Exhibits, book displays, tours
- Library tours
- Art book club, display space for student art
- Exhibits and performances in the library
- Working with visual literacy course
- Faculty for independent research (credits)

Write-in answers for the survey question “What are you providing during these interactions?”

- Project assistance
- Assist with performance space/exhibits
- Collection development for art
- Introduction with functions-based collections
- There is a new interior design sample
- We wear many hats

- Graduate writing mentor
- School of visual arts regularly
- Fostering communication
- I also taught a how-to-embroider course
- Academic technology support (learning)
- Outreach and student activities, partnering
- Collection maintenance
- Displays

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