



# COMMUNITY USERS IN NORTH AMERICAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: AN EXAMINATION OF FUNDRAISING POTENTIAL

## *Prebivalci lokalne skupnosti kot uporabniki severnoameriških visokošolskih knjižnic: poskus pridobivanja dodatnih finančnih sredstev*

Wanda V. Dole, J.B. Hill

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### **Abstract**

In 2007 the Ottenheimer Library at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), decided to extend library privileges *gratis* to members of the community as a gesture of good will and a potential tool for fund-raising. Privileges extended include borrowing items from the circulating collection and use of reference materials (paper and electronic) and other non-circulating materials in the library building.

**Purpose:** This paper reports the results of the five-year experiment to extend borrowing privileges to community users.

**Methodology/Approach:** It describes the findings of a Web-based survey conducted to obtain information on demographics and community users' perception of the value of library privileges (Dole and Hill, 2012) and the results of an appeals letter sent to solicit donations and to study the correlation between community users' receiving library privileges and donating.

**Findings:** Although these users had said that they value the services the Library extended to them and were more likely to donate money (Dole and Hill 2012), few did donate as a result of the appeals letter.

**Research Limitations:** This paper reports on the responses of community users at one North American academic library and may or may not provide guidance for other libraries contemplating approaching community users for donations. The results of this study may or may not be generalizable to all academic libraries.



**Originality/Practical Implications:** There has been little research that attempts to assess community users' perception of the value of an academic library's extending library privileges to them. Previous studies surveyed librarians about their perceptions of the pros and cons of extending privileges.

**Keywords:** *academic libraries, community borrowers, external users, value of library and information services, fund-raising*

## Razširjeni povzetek

Univerza Arkansas v Little Rocku (ZDA) je drugi največji od šestih kampusov javnega univerzitetnega sistema Univerze Arkansas. Izvaja več kot 100 študijskih dodiplomskih in podiplomskih programov, v katere je vpisanih več kot 13.000 študentov. Knjižnično informacijsko podpora njeni izobraževalni in znanstvenoraziskovalni dejavnosti zagotavlja Univerzitetna knjižnica Ottenheimer, ki je močno vpeta ne le v življenje univerzitetne, ampak tudi lokalne skupnosti. Od leta 2007 si knjižnica prizadeva čim več brezplačnih storitev, prvotno namenjenih le uporabnikom univerze (dostop do interneta, izposoja gradiva ter uporaba referenčnega gradiva in elektronskih virov), zagotavljati tudi okoliškim prebivalcem. Ukinitve članarin in večja dostopnost informacijskih virov ter storitev knjižnice sta opazno povečali število t. i. zunanjih uporabnikov, študije pa so pokazale, da okoliški prebivalci visoko cenijo takšno usmeritev knjižnice. Zaradi možnosti uporabe knjižničnih storitev naj bi čutili večjo pripadnost in naklonjenost univerzi, nekateri pa tudi večjo pripravljenost prispevati finančna sredstva za dejavnost knjižnice. Raziskave sicer kažejo, da večina severnoameriških visokošolskih knjižnic javnih univerz prebivalcem lokalnih skupnosti omogoča uporabo knjižničnega gradiva in storitev v prostorih knjižnic, nekatere pa tudi izposoja gradiva na dom. Le malo pa je podatkov o tem, ali se njihova vlaganja v zagotavljanje storitev za širšo skupnost tudi povrnejo (ang. return on investment), bodisi posredno (javna podpora knjižnici) ali neposredno (več prejetih finančnih sredstev).

Analiza strukture lokalnih uporabnikov Univerzitetne knjižnice Ottenheimer je pokazala, da se delijo na dve tipični skupini; v prvi so uporabniki, ki knjižnico obiskujejo predvsem zaradi izposoje gradiva, druga skupina pa knjižnico uporablja zaradi dostopa do interneta, elektronskih informacijskih virov in elektronske pošte. Ukinitve članarin in dostopnejši pogoji izposoje gradiva so močno povečali število »izposojevalcev« gradiva, ki so si izposodili dvakrat več gradiva kot prej. Knjižnica je izvedla tudi spletno anketno raziskavo, s katero je pridobila podatke o demografskih značilnostih omenjenih uporabnikov ter njihovem vrednotenju knjižničnih storitev. Rezultati ankete so bili spodbudni, saj so anketirani izrazili zelo pozitiven odnos do knjižnice in njene dejavnosti, petina med njimi pa je navedla, da bodo v prihodnje knjižnici še raje donirali denarne prispevke. Čeprav namen povečanja obsega storitev za uporabnike iz lokalne skupnosti ni bil v pridobivanju dodatnih finančnih sredstev, je knjižnica pričakovala, da bodo njena prizadevanja navsezadnje imela tudi tovrsten učinek.



Jeseni leta 2011 je knjižnica želela preveriti, ali so omenjena pričakovanja realna. V projekt je vključila le uporabnike, ki so si v preteklih štirih letih izposojali gradivo, saj je predvidevala, da finančno stanje tistih, ki v knjižnico prihajajo zaradi uporabe njenih računalnikov oziroma dostopa do interneta, ne dopušča izdatkov za donacije. Od 705 prejemnikov prošnje za doniranje sredstev so se odzvali le trije, s skupaj 145 doniranimi ameriški dolarji. Avtorja prispevka domnevata, da bi razlog lahko bil v tem, da je v lokalnem okolju univerze dohodek na družino v povprečju (mediana) relativno nizek, vendar bo treba vzroke tudi natančneje proučiti. Poudarjata, da morajo visokošolske knjižnice dobro poznati tudi svoje »zunanje« uporabnike in ugotoviti, kakšno vrednost (družbeno in ekonomsko) zanje predstavlja dejavnost knjižnice.

*Ključne besede:* visokošolske knjižnice, uporabniki, lokalna skupnost, vrednost knjižnice, financiranje

## 1 Introduction

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) is a public, metropolitan university committed to outreach and community engagement. The University and the Ottenheimer Library play a leadership role in the community and improving the development of Little Rock, Central Arkansas and the University District (i.e., the neighborhoods surrounding the university). In support of the University's outreach efforts, the Library began extending free library privileges to unaffiliated members of the community in 2007. Privileges include Internet access, the ability to borrow circulating materials and to use resources of all types (electronic resources, reference works and other non-circulating materials) within the library.

An earlier study (Dole and Hill, 2011) used records from the integrated library system and the print management system to identify community users and the impact of discontinuing fees for access to collections and services. The study found that eliminating fees and liberalizing circulation policies significantly increased the number of community borrowers. A follow-up study (Dole and Hill, 2012) examined community users' needs and opinions. Users overwhelming indicated that they valued the services that the Library extended to them. Many users stated that as a result of receiving library services they were more likely to attend the University and/or support legislation to aid higher education. Some even said that they were more likely to donate money to the Library or University.

This paper examines whether community users are indeed more likely to donate as a result of receiving library privileges. The authors queried the Library's integrated library system and retrieved the names and addresses of Arkansas-based community users who had borrowed materials from the Library during the past four years. They



sent letters soliciting donations to 825 community users and recorded the donations received via the campus Development Office to determine the success of the fund-raising campaign.

## 2 Literature Review: Community Users

Community users may be defined as »individuals who have no affiliation with the institution as students, faculty, alumni or members of the governing board and individuals affiliated with an institution through a consortium agreement for reciprocal borrowing« (Russell, 1992) or simply »just about anyone who is *not* affiliated with the college or university as students, staff and faculty» (Wilson, 2005).

A literature review (Dole and Hill, 2011) reveals general discussion about the need or lack of need for academic libraries to extend services and expend resources for unaffiliated community users. In a number of studies, researchers conducted surveys of librarians about their perceptions of the pros and cons of extending privileges.

Courtney (2003) provides an excellent summary of these surveys. The major surveys include a 1964 survey of 1,100 academic libraries by the American Library Association's Association of College and Research Libraries (Josey, 1967). This survey revealed that 94 percent of these libraries provided community users with physical access to facilities and 85 percent provided borrowing privileges. A 1989 survey of libraries at 26 large, public, urban universities (Russell, 1992) showed that 94 percent provided community users with access to reference services and collections. Courtney's 2001 survey of 814 academic libraries obtained similar results. The great majority (96 percent) of academic libraries in the United States continued to provide community users with physical access to facilities; 80 percent also provided community users with computer access, and 77 percent provided at least some community users with borrowing privileges (Courtney, 2003).

The results of a recent survey of library deans/directors from libraries at Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) member institutions were similar to those of previous surveys (Dole and Hill, 2013). The majority (98 percent) of these libraries gave community users building access to collections and services and borrowing privileges (73 percent).

The literature contains very little information on either the actual cost of providing services to external/community users or the possible return on investment (good will, monetary donations).



### 3 UALR and Community Users: Institutional Setting

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock is a Carnegie DRU (doctoral research university). Established in 1927 as Little Rock Junior College, the University became a four-year institution, Little Rock University, in 1957 and a member of the University of Arkansas System in 1969. Within this multi-campus system, UALR is state supported and operationally separate. The University currently enrolls over 13,000 students and offers a wide range of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs through the doctorate in humanities, social sciences, sciences, business, education and professional studies.

UALR is a public, metropolitan university with a diverse, non-traditional student population. Twenty-three percent of the students are African American and 7 percent, from other minority groups. Fifty-six percent of students are 25 years or older; 47 percent attend part-time. A high percentage (92) is commuters and approximately 70 percent attended one or more other institution before enrolling at the UALR.

### 4 Previous UALR Studies

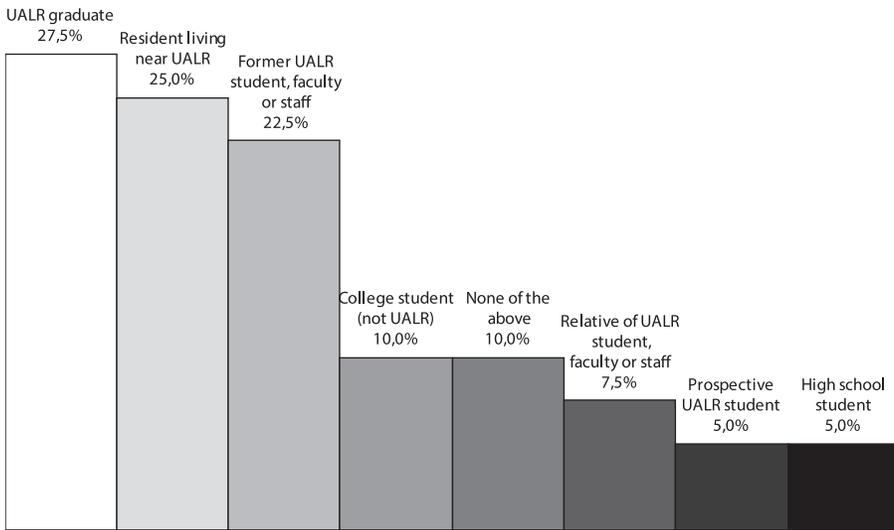
A preliminary study (Dole and Hill, 2011) examined user records from the integrated library system and the computer logon/print management system to identify community users and the results of the Library's discontinuing fees for access to library collections and services. The study identified two distinct groups of community users: "borrowers" who check out materials from the collection and "computer users" who use library computers to access databases, e-mail and the Internet. Although the two groups used the library differently, their demographic profiles were similar. Borrowers were predominately female (58 percent) and computer users were more evenly divided (51 percent male and 49 percent female). The median age for both groups was similar: 35 for borrowers and 33 for computer users. There was very little overlap between the two groups, as most computer users (84 percent) were not borrowers and most borrowers (85 percent) did not hold community computer user accounts. The study found that discontinuing fees and liberalizing circulation policies significantly increased the number of community borrowers; circulation of materials to this group doubled as a percent of overall library circulation activity from 4 to 8 percent. Circulation increased from 1,737 in 2006 to 3,092 in 2007 and remained steady at 3,098 in 2008.

A second study (Dole and Hill, 2012) reported the results of a 2010 Web-based survey of community users. It provided demographic information about the users and solicited their opinions on the utility and value of the library services extended to them. As can be seen in Figure 1, the survey responses revealed that a large number of com-



munity users at UALR had some connection to the University, either being a former student or a relative to a student, faculty or staff member. Most survey respondents (78 percent) described themselves as occasional library users. The Library's collections, both print and electronic, were the primary attraction. Users visited the Library to borrow materials and/or use databases and print collections onsite.

### What is your current status?

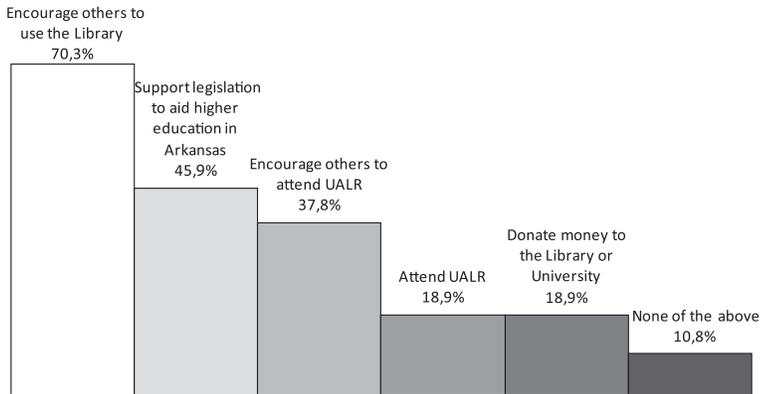


**Figure 1:** Relationship of UALR Community Users to the University

All respondents considered the Library valuable to the Little Rock community; 73 percent considered it to be extremely valuable. Respondents indicated positive feelings as a result of their experience using the Library. As shown in Figure 2, 70 percent indicated that, as a result of their experience, they would encourage others to use the Library; 46 percent indicated that they would support legislation to aid higher education and 38 percent said that they would attend or encourage others to attend UALR. Nineteen percent said that they would be more likely to donate money to the Library or University.



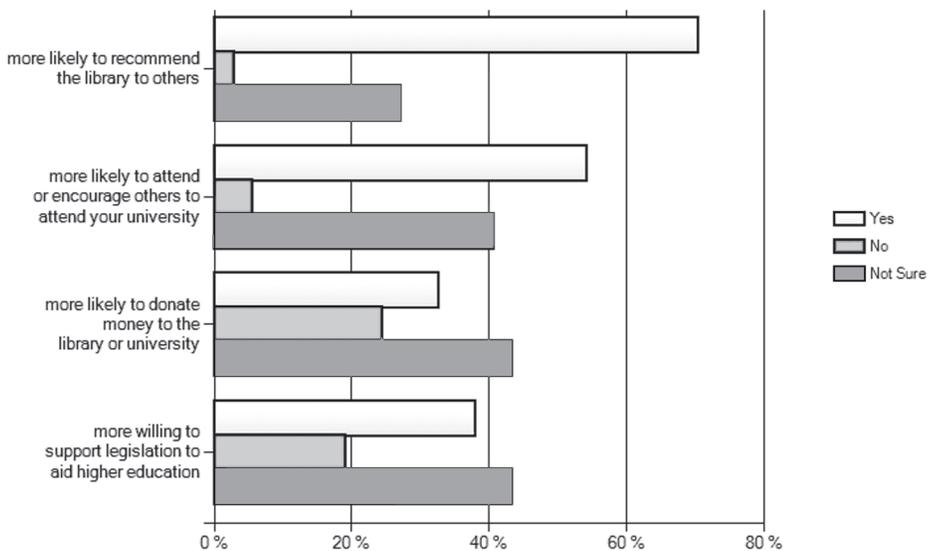
**Because of your experience using the Library, would you be more likely to**



*Figure 2: Survey Opinions of UALR Community Users, 2010*

Although fund-raising is not a major reason for extending services to community users (see Figure 3), it has been reported as a possible outcome. When library deans/directors of urban libraries were surveyed in 2011, 32.5 percent indicated that they believed that community users were “more likely to donate money” as a result of the services that the libraries offered to the users (Dole and Hill, 2013).

**Potential Benefits to Institution of Offering of Services**



*Figure 3: Survey Opinions of Urban U.S. Library Deans/Directors, 2011*



## 5 This Study: Community Borrowers as Donors

Although respondents to the 2010 UALR survey indicated some willingness to donate money, there was no indication of their doing so. A previous examination of the Library's donor list found no correlation between library donors and community users (Dole and Hill, 2011). Until 2011 the Library had not made a targeted effort to solicit donations from community users specifically.

In fall 2011 the authors decided to test the assumption that community borrowers would donate. At the outset of the study, the authors assumed that community users, especially computer users, might not have a great deal of discretionary income. Anecdotal evidence suggested that at least some computer users regularly came to the Library to access the Internet, because they did not have the income to purchase Internet access at home. Consequently, the fund-raising campaign was directed toward borrowers rather than computer users.

The authors compiled a list of community borrowers who had checked out materials during the previous four years. They narrowed the list to those users who had a mailing address indicating a current Arkansas place of residence. Duplicate entries were eliminated to avoid sending a solicitation to more than one member of any household.

In December 2011, the authors shared the list with the University's Development Office to eliminate duplication with other appeals campaigns and to receive permission to launch the appeal. With the assistance of a member of the Library's Development Board, they drafted an appeals letter to community borrowers and in February 2012 sent letters with self-addressed, postage-free envelopes to 825 community borrowers.

Of the letters mailed, 14 percent (120) letters were returned because the address was no longer valid and there was no forwarding address. Of the 705 letters delivered, only three generated donations, totaling \$145.00. Consequently, the appeals letter campaign was unsuccessful as it failed to generate enough revenue to offset the costs of the mailing.

## 6 Conclusions

The appeals letter campaign followed up earlier studies that identified types and numbers of community users of UALR's Ottenheimer Library and solicited their opinions on the utility and value of the library services extended to them (Dole and Hill, 2011, 2012). Community users at UALR generally have some connection to the University.



Name street city, state	February 2012
Dear Mr.,	
<p>UALR is proud of the Ottenheimer Library. We hope that you have found it an asset to both you and the community. The University provides generous support for library operations and extensive collections, but increasingly additional resources are needed to meet all of the Library's requirements.</p>	
<p>For instance, the changing research needs of students and community users require renovating the facilities to provide technologically rich work spaces. In the immediate future, we plan to make significant improvements to the group areas on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. These improvements will be expensive, so we are asking you as a community user to consider contributing to the Ottenheimer Library.</p>	
<p>You may make a one-time donation or a longer term commitment. Any amount would be greatly appreciated. We are enclosing a postage-free envelope for your convenience. Please make checks payable to Ottenheimer Library Development Fund. To donate by credit card, please make your payment online at <a href="https://donations.ualr.edu">https://donations.ualr.edu</a>, designating Ottenheimer Library as the recipient.</p>	
<p>Thank you for your consideration and let us know how the Library can better serve you.</p>	
Sincerely,	
	
Shannon Chamberlin Ottenheimer Library Community User & Library Development Board Member	Wanda V. Dole Dean, Ottenheimer Library

**Figure 4:** Sample Appeals Letter to UALR Community Users

They perceive the services provided to them as valuable and appear to have experienced an increase in good will toward the University and the Library as a result. While extending privileges to community borrowers appears to build social capital, our experience at UALR indicates that it does not generate financial donations in the short term.

Successful fund-raising depends on accurately identifying potential donors. UALR's community users have been identified and shown to have some connection to the University in addition to being a library user. Little is known about the financial capacity of community users. A previous study indicated that the typical UALR community borrower is a female in her mid-30s. Additional socio-economic information is less certain.



In general, the income of citizens served by UALR is relatively modest. The neighborhoods surrounding the campus are generally lower-income. The median family income in Arkansas is approximately \$37,000 and the median family income of incoming UALR students is less than \$50,000. As such, the clientele served by Ottenheimer Library may not have the discretionary income to be donors.

This study reports the results of a fund-raising campaign from one North American urban academic library. The results of the campaign may or may not be generalizable to all academic libraries. Academic libraries that serve higher income community users may find greater success in conducting fund-raising campaigns directed toward this clientele.

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### Wanda V. Dole

Dean of Ottenheimer Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
e-pošta: wvdole@ualr.edu

### J.B. Hill

Director of Public Services at Ottenheimer Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
e-pošta: jbill@ualr.edu