# "Making Life Better:" Faculty, Responsibility, and Students in Effective Library Use

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KCKCC students come to us from many different social and economic backgrounds, as well as from a variety of scholastic environments. The KCKCC College Fact book affirms that Wyandotte County is becoming increasingly diverse in its ethnic make-up, due primarily to the rapid growth in the Hispanic community. This research-based publication goes on to state that a relatively high percentage of county residents are foreign born, that the unemployment rate in the county continues to be considerably higher than the state average, and that many Wyandotte County residents are under-prepared for highly skilled jobs (*KCKCC College Fact Book*, Center for Research & Development, July 2009).

Environmental and economic factors inherent in Wyandotte County are a reality for our students, but these external influences in the area in which the college exists do not prevent students' ability to look beyond some of these negative features of the county. We as faculty members have a special responsibility to ensure that our students take advantage of the necessary tools to develop as students who can attain degrees and move forward with their lives. Lack of understanding of the importance of effective library use should not be a stumbling block determining ability of our students to become thriving learners at KCKCC and beyond. The library is one of those important academic tools necessary for student success. And, it is our responsibility to promote effective library use as an integral part of a successful educational experience. Sometimes students do not appear to be aware of this fact, and it is up to our faculty to make this clear.

We advertise that KCKCC is "Making Life Better" for students, but is this always the case? With better cooperation between different areas of the college, we can assist KCKCC students to cultivate their student roles so that they can effectively grow academically. One way that each and every faculty member can lend a hand is to encourage and facilitate student use of the library. Effective and informed library use will make our students' lives better in many ways, while they are KCKCC students, if and when they become university students, and as lifelong learners in any capacity. According to the *"KCKCC College Fact Book,"* nearly 22% of Wyandotte County residents have not earned high school diplomas. We need to "ensure that students of color and underprepared students have all the services they need not just to enroll but succeed through graduation" (Watson, J., 2010). One essential role for faculty members is to serve as cheerleaders, encouraging understanding of the necessity of effective library use as an important component of academic life for the successful student.

Another consideration pointed out by the *KCKCC College Fact Book* is that it is imperative for us to remember that students are not simply learners, but are also "customers" who expect educational institutions to make an effort to meet their needs. Students may "shop" for preferred qualities in a college environment as they scrutinize area education facilities. Therefore, in spite of negative economic statistics of the surrounding county, the perception of KCKCC as an institution with cooperative faculty members promoting use of a valuable library is paramount for the recruitment and maintenance of a successful student population. "The active involvement and support of the academic library staff and resources will be a key to students' acquiring lifelong learning abilities….In partnership with academic administrators and classroom faculty, librarians can enhance instruction, research, and service while supporting the eventual transformation of higher education" (Breivik, Gee, 2006, p. 2). In other words, administrators, teaching and library faculty need to work closely to promote the importance of the library in facilitating information literacy, an essential element of college education.

Community colleges are "expected to fill an enormous void in our culture and in our educational system, to bridge a gap that in many cases seems unbridgeable, to break down barriers of race and class" (Geiselman, 2011). Her blog post is entitled: ***My hard lessons teaching community college***: ***The majority of my students will have a hard time "making it." Sometimes I wonder: Should they be in school at all?*** She continues:

> "In any given class, there might be a handful of displaced workers, some first-generation college students, a couple of immigrants, one or two recovering addicts, half a dozen young slackers, and as many industrious self-starters. Maybe there are some pissed-off 18-year-olds who would rather be drinking beer far from home but whose parents suddenly can't afford the party school education they'd envisioned…. They have been sentenced, instead, to community college. It is, in short, a mixed bag." (Geiselman, Kate, Salon.com. Monday, March 7, 2011,

Geiselman goes on to affirm that college isn't for everyone, as many KCKCC faculty members have observed for themselves. However, the "mentoring," programs, etc. that distinguish an institution like KCKCC from four year universities are the keys to success for our students to become learners whose life circumstances allow the necessary dedication for college success. "Community colleges have an advantage of providing a caring learning experience" (Alfred, et. Al. p.57). Outreach efforts at our library also distinguish it from four year universities, as KCKCC students are encouraged to interact with reference librarians who are willing and able to invest the time necessary on a one-on-one basis to allow student understanding of usage of the intricate library database system necessary for academic achievement. "Faculty assume that students know how to use a library before they come to college, but that's not always the case,….And those students usually feel too intimidated to ask faculty for help. Some don't even know the difference between ***Google*** and a database."  (Paulita Aguilar cited by Lum, 2010, p. 6). Non-scholarly materials are often accessed by students who many times appear to be only familiar with this type of searching when attempting to access sources for academic writing assignments.

Community colleges have often led the way in establishing the importance of information literacy. In 2002, the American Association of Community Colleges Board of Directors made the public statement that information literacy skills lead to competent students who understand the importance of lifelong learning. In today's world of limited financial resources for education, "a new partnership must blossom among academic administrators, faculty, and librarians." We are all working toward the same goals…."Making life better" for our students. through becoming successful scholars. "Librarians and faculty members are both involved in teaching students how to make use of the information resources available in their campus library. Collaboration between faculty and librarians is essential to enhance students learning and research, and help them develop their information competencies," (Yousef, 2010, p.3). One approach to aid underprepared students is to "embed" library faculty members in specific classes to facilitate library use for the class, and to put a "face" on the necessary literacy assistance. This embedded librarian could provide an access point for effective information literacy assistance for the class, as well as assist with the use of those "mysterious" library tools, such as the ubiquitous databases, the effective use of which is necessary for successfully navigating college coursework. This approach could be effective for online as well as on ground courses. The current use of "Research Guides" available through KCKCC Library website for specific classes can potentially ease some of the fears of students searching for information appropriate for specific courses, as well as alleviate fears of instructors that students will only access ***Google*** and ***Wikipedia*** to locate source material for research projects in courses they are teaching. "Googling a question is only one step in the process of ***libraryizing*** a question," which he explains as the librarian's goal of searching for a functional answer for the patron, whether resources are in print, online, or media (Guthrie, ***Library Journal***, June 15, 2011)

Faculty will not be shocked to discover that "students are largely motivated by the ease of access and time-saving aspects of Internet use, rather than in doing good research." (Revik & Gee, 2008, p. 27). KCKCC librarians are willing to be partners with faculty in working toward the goal of helping students understand the value of adding the ability to complete good research to their academic skills. Many KCKCC students use the

library computer lab for completing online class requirements because oftentimes they do not have personal computers at home.  Students in a community college setting such as KCKCC often feel comfortable requesting assistance from library staff members in using word processing programs with which they are not familiar, as well as help with accessing online course information.  As librarians we attempt to look at the bigger information picture than is sometimes possible for information technology professionals who more strongly focus on the hardware and software issues than the successful search process.  As librarians we have been trained to focus on supporting the user to find as well as apply and assimilate necessary information, whether they be developmental or advanced students.  The process does not involve doing the searches for students, but ensuring that they have the knowledge to effectively find information for their coursework, and then translate this into information-seeking behavior they can apply to all areas of their lives.

There are a myriad of issues to be considered in a world in which students are constantly wired through attachment to *Facebook,* etc., via their *I-Phones* or other electronic devices.  Learning to effectively use the library for research is an important gateway to continued education outside our walls, but there are many other reasons for knowing how to use the library that are equally important for students while they're here at KCKCC.  Some examples are of library services available at KCKCC are librarians who will take the time to assist students and faculty to:

- Find useful resources to solve information problems.
- To locate information in regard to online access to the library, and help with access to online classes, if necessary.
- Provide information about KCKCC's excellent Reference Collection, both online and hard copy.
- Share knowledge of the Leisure Book collection which is important for understanding outlets that the library can provide other than nonfiction college level books for checkout.  (We have noticed that those students who are "library people" have more success in their coursework.)
- Use displays of library materials to relate to topics of interest.
- Locate music CD's in the large collection available for checkout.
- Assist students in use of the library Computer Lab.
- Use library study rooms for small group study sessions.


KCKCC library service attempts to bridge the digital divide between those who have advanced computer searching skills, and those who may need assistance with effectively finding quality information. It is evident that librarians  "can guide students to quality websites or other sources that provide authoritative and valuable information"   (Betne, Castongay,. 2008).  "The library has over 70,000 volumes of books, documents, and other resources on-site open over 70 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters. Also available are thousands of electronic library resources available 24 hours a day. …One of the library's aims is to provide access to any information in any format. Through its web-based electronic resources and interlibrary loan, students and faculty have access to research materials on a global as well as regional and national level. KCKCC Library Website).  However, some students need assistance with accessing this information, especially as novices to using the system.    Research had found that a strong faculty partnership between instructors and librarians provides the best opportunity for actual learning and achievement for our students in all classes they encounter. These groups working together with the best interests of our students at heart model for students supportive social networks, and "organizations that have begun to successfully educate some of the nation's 8 million disadvantaged urban student…. have increased rather than decreased the contact between students and adults in their schools."

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