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Student Employees Lead the Library: How Employment Shapes Student's Futures

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Student Employees Lead the Library

How employment shapes
students' futures



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Carter Harrison began his student employment at the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons service desk with the notion that he would enjoy working in the student-centered building. He wasn't expecting to discover a passion for design thinking.

"When I was first employed at the library, I didn't even know what design thinking was," Harrison said.

Thanks to a special project at the Mary Idema Pew Library, Harrison is gaining hands-on experience with design thinking. The project examines how students navigate the library when looking for a space to study. Harrison and another student employee are tweaking and prototyping a plan for a type of new service to offer when the library is busy.

"Hopefully we can work to keep improving the experience of the patrons who enjoy the space that we all hold so dear," he said.

Harrison said: "Working for University Libraries has impacted my learning in that it has made me more creative and

intuitive, and opened up my thinking to new ways of approaching problems, solving issues, researching, learning a topic, and much more."

Harrison is one of more than one hundred student employees working at Grand Valley State University Libraries. From the Steelcase Library located on the Robert C. Pew Grand Rapids Campus to the University archives in the Seidman House on the Allendale campus, student employees advance University Libraries' commitment to the community. Working both behind the scenes and in plain sight, all student roles are essential. University Libraries aims to provide student employees with experiential learning, from addressing questions at the service desk, supporting the research process of fellow students, and preparing materials for use.

Student Employment & Training

Students master skills from each of their unique roles, receiving training throughout the semester. Jason Durham, Operations Manager for Pew Campus Libraries, focuses training orientations on how student employees fit into the larger University Libraries system and



RIGHT: Students studying in the Steelcase Library located on the Pew Campus. Image by University Communications.

Grand Valley State University as a whole. Students from all three Grand Rapids locations (Steelcase Library, Curriculum Materials Library, and the Frey Foundation Learning Center) attend this orientation, giving them a chance to meet their coworkers and learn how each location works with another.

Trainings help foster community and strengthen the culture of learning among all library student employees while imparting new skills and providing opportunities for professional growth. During training and orientations, new student employees

are paired up with returning students in order to learn from their peers. Returning students show new students how the library operates, while encouraging and motivating them. “Peer training has been a huge part of building community and a motivated student workforce. It garners tremendous buy-in and creates rich learning experiences for all participants,” said Brian Merry, Head of Operations and User Services.

The Research Consultants in the Knowledge Market are paired with a Lead Research Consultant, an experienced student employee selected through an



IN PLAIN *sight*

Student employees who staff service points are the friendly face of the library, accommodating the diverse needs of the Grand Valley community. They assist users with circulation needs by checking in and out materials; they guide students through the research process; and they provide building information and tours, in addition to many other responsibilities.

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STUDENT EMPLOYEES

5

Locations

Curriculum Materials Library
Frey Foundation Learning Center
Mary Idema Pew Library
Seidman House
Steelcase Library

behind THE SCENES

Student employees who are less visible are the backbone of the library, ensuring timely access to collections and resources. They operate specialized equipment; they organize, deliver, and reshelve materials; they assist with managing electronic information and processing archival collections; and they develop promotional materials.

interview process, in order to provide mentorship and guidance. Lead Consultants facilitate bi-weekly meetings, which are an opportunity for the consultants to learn and collaborate with each other.

Allie Krukowski, a student employee, said, “I have worked here for four years now, therefore I am constantly training new people. Since I am majoring in elementary education, this gives me great practice. I have to evaluate and adjust, which will be beneficial in my teaching career.”

From the Libraries to their Lives

Whether working at a service desk or

shelving books, student employees gain an exceptional amount of knowledge about library spaces and services as well as a working knowledge of how to find information. The varied nature of questions student employees answer each day facilitates their critical thinking skills, a lifelong benefit they can take with them to the workplace.

“Our students learn many different skills that they can use in their future careers,” said Deb Maddox, a Library Specialist and student supervisor. For example, providing tours helps students gain professional poise and communication skills. “As part of our

User Experience team, our students have the opportunity to conduct user research and to provide valuable feedback on how we can improve the library,” she noted.

While University Libraries depends on student employees to function, their education and growth is still at the forefront. To foster skills in preparation for life beyond college, University Libraries has created high-impact projects. These projects can be to students who are looking to advance toward their future endeavors.

At the Curriculum Materials Library, Donna Oster, a Library Specialist and student supervisor, often hires education

"The roles student employees play at the library are critical to our success."

Brian Merry, *Head of Operations*

students. This opportunity provides student employees hands-on experience with lesson planning and creating bulletin board displays, much like they will do in their own classrooms someday.

Similarly, at the Frey Foundation Learning Center at the Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences, Patty Kishman, a Library Specialist and student supervisor, often hires students who are already going to be in the building for class. Mirroring the collaborative nature of the medical field, student workers get a more in-depth view of how to find information, allowing them to use those skills in their own work as well as bringing that knowledge back to their cohorts.

A graphic design student assists with designing library exhibits, creates promotional materials for library services, and oversees the design and layout of this publication, honing skills necessary for a future career in graphic design. Several students have contributed to this publication, from helping to write and edit content to creating style guidelines for future issues.

Research Consultants are immersed in instruction by assisting faculty and faculty librarians in the classroom. Faculty are able to request Research Consultants

to assist with student learning, enabling the consultants to help with all aspects of research support. Through this experience, consultants build a rich skill set of effective communication methods and research strategies, preparing them for graduate school opportunities and future careers.

Impact on Students' Futures

In addition to building skills needed for success in the twenty-first century workplace, some student employees discover a new career direction through their work in University Libraries.

Hollie Bellingher, a senior student employee, said she chose to enroll at Grand Valley because of the library and was inspired to apply to be a student employee after seeing the students behind the service desk smiling back at her.

"This job has made me realize that I love libraries, helping people, the research behind everything, how a building operates," Bellingher said. "It made me want to go into library science and become an academic librarian. This job has given me the confidence I need in the classroom and when talking to others."

Students working at Seidman House, the location of Special Collections and University Archives, are immersed in unique projects. Andrea Bazan volunteered in summer 2017 after learning about archives as a profession from her advisor. "I came in not knowing anything and left with having processed an entire collection."

"As I hurtled toward my senior year here at Grand Valley, I began to wonder what kinds of job opportunities I could find with my minor and discovered archivist was among them. Now I am thinking about working in archives as a career and moving on to graduate school."

Bazan helped process the Mike McDonnell papers, which involved going through boxes of the Michigan artist's collection spanning 1959-2010. The collection included gallery rejection letters, tools and sketchbooks, paintings, and photographs. Bazan's intimate experience with McDonnell's work made a difference in her career path.

Vision

Whether working to develop skills outside of the classroom, for financial reasons or for personal enrichment, University Libraries strive to make a difference with every student employed. Annie Bélanger, Dean of University Libraries, is passionate about student employment and has a clear vision that is focused on opportunities.

"We need to ensure that we are creating high impact projects, and consider how we are scaffolding our positions as pathways," Bélanger said. Included in this vision are opportunities to advance, increased scholarship programs, engaging in assistantships, and internship possibilities. Bélanger stated, "As students work with us, they can develop a varied set of skills in order to help them with their lifelong success."