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Checking Out Things at the Library – Including These Myths

By Meg Scharf

UCF Forum columnist

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It is wonderful to work at our university: It's vibrant, it's a beautiful place, and people on campus are fascinating.

There are a lot of myths out there in the community, however, about life and people on campus. Some are perpetuated by movies and other media, everything from *The Absent-Minded Professor* to *Animal House*.

Many think that professors are overly absorbed in their work and one-dimensional, administrators are boring and pompous, students are only here to party, and researchers are nerds who are always in the lab, like the characters in some of Gary Larson's *Far Side* cartoons or the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* who wear lab coats and are socially inept.

Very little of this is true.

So, of course, there are myths about the university library, where I work. Friends, neighbors and people in line at the grocery store have asked some of these questions for years:

"Are you on vacation now? You are closed down for the summer, right?" Every summer I receive this one from two or three people. Summer enrollment at UCF exceeds 30,000 students. And faculty and graduate research is not a seasonal activity; it is year-round. So we need to be open.

"You must get a lot of reading done at work." I know the commenter means leisure reading, so I wish this were true, every time I hear it.

"Wow, you probably have the chance to buy anything you want to read for the library collection." Titles the library purchases are meant to support teaching, learning and research in UCF's program offerings. Librarians and teaching faculty build the collections to supply UCF's scholars and researchers with needed resources. There is a Web page for suggested additions to the collection. And there is a browsing collection for leisure reading on the second floor of the John C. Hitt Library, with mysteries, romances and popular fiction—and if you get that autobiography of Keith Richards

checked out before I do this weekend, I will just have to read something else! (By the way, Richards said he wanted to be a librarian when he grew up.)

“It must be nice never having to talk to people all day long at work” or “It must be nice to work in such a quiet place.” Not much quieter than many other workplaces. We have two quiet floors, but the other three floors are buzzing with activity from open to close. Yes, librarians talk all day long, to students, teaching faculty, staff and our community.

“Isn’t everything online now?” A great deal of material is online. Libraries build collections of accurate information and make it available online. We have all come to know that information randomly gathered from the Internet is not always correct or timely. And a great deal of material remains in print. Some material is only available in print; other material is more easily used in print. A recent Pew Research report, *Book Reading 2016*, states that 65 percent of Americans have read at least one print book in the past 12 months. The typical (median) American has read four books in the past 12 months. Which four books did you read?

“So why don’t you just scan/digitize all the books in the library?” Besides the time and expense, and the fact that many still prefer print, an ethical desire to protect copyright keeps us from digitizing our collection. While the library owns 1.6 million print volumes, it also holds close to 150,000 e-books, and has access to titles in the HathiTrust, a [partnership](#) of academic and research institutions that offers a collection of millions of titles digitized from libraries around the world.

“Do students still go to the library?” Yes, about 1.26 million visitors walked into the John C. Hitt Library on campus last year, and most were students. They come to research, read, write, reflect and work on class assignments. Many come to use information technology and work collaboratively on presentations or assignments. Others come to consult with librarians, ask questions or receive instruction on the use of library resources. Many students use the library remotely, in their homes, offices and around campus, to research, get resources and interact with librarians, who can answer questions and assist them online.

“Do you really need a new library building?” The project has begun at UCF and so many of the faculty and staff of the campus libraries have been asked this question lately. Well, as a matter of fact, yes, we need a new library building. And when I write “we,” I mean all of us connected to UCF: faculty, staff, current and future students, and members of the wider community—not just the faculty and staff at the libraries. The need for resources and services to support UCF’s research aspirations and teaching and learning is growing exponentially. The 21st Century Library project will provide space designed for students to pursue individual and collaborative research and study. An area for graduate students, a digital commons, an expanded special collections area and much more will be part of the library’s future.

Yes, there are myths and misconceptions about much of what we do at the university. Just contact us, and we can help you bust some of those myths – even during summer.

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