

2-2002

February 2002: Kicking It Up a Notch

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Recommended Citation

Dacus Library, "February 2002: Kicking It Up a Notch" (2002). *The Deans Corner*. Book 9.
<http://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/deanscorner/9>

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the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / FEBRUARY 2002 / NUMBER 19

Kicking It Up a Notch

We need you to kick your library support up a notch!

I have it on good authority that there is what is called “The Food Network” that broadcasts food preparation programs exclusively. Further, I have it on good authority—trust me on this—that there is a certain chef, Emeril by name, who has as his catch phrase, “Let’s kick it up a notch!” This tag line is generally followed by the word “Bam!” at which time a hot, spicy ingredient, such as pepper, is added to almost any recipe.

Perhaps “kicking it up a notch” does not convey precisely what one wishes for in an academic setting. *Supererogation* comes to mind, an “act or a process or instance of performing more than is required by duty or obligation.” Or perhaps, *lagniappe* obtains: “something given or obtained by way of bonus or good measure.” But we risk pedantry on those scores. In the end, it really doesn’t matter. All will do, or one, so long as the point is clear:

We need you to kick your library support up a notch! Bam!

Bam? Before I go on, surf over to <http://www.winthrop.edu/dacus> and click on

“Library Fund Raising” to see what “bam” means, or rather can mean. I’ll wait.

Back now? The list is both ambitious and overwhelming. But if you think about these things in real terms, in terms of what matters, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as the theologians might say, perhaps our list is far from being ambitious by falling too far short. Here’s what I mean.

Libraries are the souls of culture, the treasure troves of truth. I don’t mean to sound either prosaic or pedantic, pedestrian or a purveyor of clichés. *Think* about what we hold in libraries: the sum total of all our truths, of all our best and brightest, our staggering stumbles and our crowning achievements. Where would we be without libraries? Certainly our lives are enriched by entertainments, but when you get right down to it, many of us would not be appreciably changed if we had never seen some sporting event. But *The Brothers Karamazov!*? *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire!*? *From Dawn to Decadence!*!

Clearly our lives are not only enriched, but

also forever altered. From our first encounter with reading – whether it was *Goodnight, Moon*, *Petunia*, *the Silly Goose*, or *Pat the Bunny*, and later, *War and Peace*, *Wiseblood*, or *King Lear*—your life is changed for the better. Your list will differ from mine because that is the wonder of libraries. Our collective conscience of culture is as various as ourselves – at once as rich, and as burdensome, as the society it records.

In his touchstone work, *The Allegory of Love*, C. S. Lewis observes, “Humanity does not pass through phases as a train through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sense, we still are.” Libraries are living, sociological atlases of humanity, of human sentiment and being, reminding us that whatever we have become, or think we are, record-keeping attends all. Libraries allow us to dip our mental fingers in the stream of time and touch selfhood at whatever point we wish, whether with last week’s best-sellers, or

ones from 500 years ago.

Your contribution may or may not be housed in a library; but your contribution to the preservation of this record-keeping can be (should be?) housed in ours. When you kick your library support up a notch—**bam!**—you support every student, every field of endeavor, every career. We need you to help us record history – your history, our history, the world's history. *We cannot do it without you.*

Now some of you looking at our list of goals may be thinking to ourselves, "Surely we don't need another library. We now have the Internet!" We've tried to answer this myth in more than one place, but see it so often we're compelled to dispel it once more. The Internet, while wonderful, is no substitute for a library. *Anyone* can put up information, even (and especially) if it's all wrong. *Reliable, trustworthy* knowledge is not cheap. Nearly all that you find on the Internet is hardly a decade old. Furthermore, less than 10% of all university journals reside on the web, and a much smaller percentage of books are there. Moreover, e-book ventures, whereby books are being placed on the web, have fallen on very hard times. Many have either reduced staffs by 50% or more, or have filed for bankruptcy. While this doesn't mean electronic access is dead, it does mean that there is more myth than material about its vibrancy and ubiquity.

Obviously the idea that everything will be digitized soon is silly. Silly because "soon" means "not in our lifetimes."

Silly, too, because we do not want everything digitized even if we could afford it (to digitize all of Dacus's holdings would cost a sizable fortune!). Even so, nothing can ever replace the physical experience of reading. Perhaps the silliness would be better understood if I said, "Why don't we digitize the Super Bowl. Then you could just point and click on the outcome you want."

Further, a new library benefits everyone in Rock Hill and York County, not just Winthrop and its students. Our doors are open to the greater Rock Hill and York areas. It's just part of our service to Rock Hill and to the promulgation of knowledge. Of course, increasing your support is not just about buildings, it's about truth; it's about providing access to the best that has been dreamed, discovered, described.

In some ways, in our soundbite, fast food culture, we've lost more than we know. If you've ever had the chance to visit libraries around the world—the Library of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada; the Cathedral Library in Freising Germany; the Abbey Library in St. Gallen, Switzerland; or the marvelous Strahov in the Czech Republic, to name but a few—then you know what care and detail were given to these inexpressibly beautiful facilities. I know I read too much into them, but when you look at these buildings, especially their interiors, you are struck by their breathtaking beauty. It is as if architects were trying to capture the beauty of truth by the very chamber in which it would be held.

Ruskin, the great art critic, is to the point here: "What do we,

as a nation, care about books? How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public or private, as compared with what we spend on our horses?" When people tell me our goals are too ambitious, I think of this line, only I substitute for "entertainment" for "horses." We're not opposed to entertainment. We just bristle when literally billions are spent on the same things, yet quibble over dimes to vouchsafe our continuation and preservation of truth for this century, and the next.

Dacus has made incredible, even extraordinary, gains over the last few years. Our budgets have increased owing to an attentive administration. We have secured more grants. And our efforts to "preach" the library word is perhaps more ubiquitous than ever before. *But we need your help; in fact we cannot do it without you.*

So, help us, will you? We all need to kick our efforts up a notch: from individuals, to faculty, to staff, to students, to alumni, to corporations, to legislators! The "bam" that follows will reverberate now, and forever.

We're counting on you. We're counting on you the way you've always counted on libraries when you were in school, when you needed an answer or when you simply wanted refreshment. You've always counted on libraries. Now Dacus is counting on you. Kick it up a notch, will you?

Mark Y. Herring
Dean of Library Services

the dean's corner

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