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To Lend is to Love: The Benefits of a Lending Library on Campus

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HNRS 4990: Honors Project

Shawn Morin, Dr. Ruthy Light

Dec. 8, 2020

Research Questions and Justification:

When I came to BGSU as a first-year student, I was new to everything, especially the Honors College. The concept of the Honors Project fascinated me, and I immediately began to think of ideas of what I wanted to do. One of the first things I thought of was building a lending library for Bowling Green State University's campus. I tried to think of other ideas, but that one always resonated with me much more than anything else. Today, I have proudly completed the project, taking this mere idea I had four years and making it a reality.

When I began to create a plan for the lending library, I had a few research questions I wanted to follow. I started my research by asking "what are the benefits of reading for college students, or in general?" I scoped out a variety of resources and found very interesting results. One source said that students spend the least amount of time per week reading for pleasure compared to academic reading and internet usage (Huang et al., 2014). If students are spending a significant amount of time reading for academic purposes, then by consistency reading must be an important element of success for college students. It also must mean that the readings hold value in what they are learning, which can only help shape them into more knowledgeable, well-rounded individuals prior and post-graduation.

After understanding the significance of academic reading, I wanted to learn more about reading for fun and the benefits it has on college students. In my research, I found that reading for pleasure improves comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and writing style, as well as cultural awareness and verbal fluency (Gauder et al., 2007, p. 4). If leisure reading does all these things, then we must provide more resources to support this. That is why I wanted to create the lending library on campus. I knew that it would be an important tool for students to utilize. Not only would students have the opportunity to exchange old books for new books, but they

would also have the chance to increase their academic success with these newfound benefits in reading.

Another question I wanted to research was, “What impact do printed texts make in comparison to electronic materials?” I personally find that using printed materials is more helpful than electronic materials because I am able to manipulate the pages and experience the reading in a fuller way as compared to reading from a screen that provides no room for manipulation. Printed materials have also shown to have better effects on reading comprehension than electronic texts (Delgado et al., 2018, p. 34). The lending library supported the research and allowed students to find printed materials to use for classes, which could lead them to higher achievements. Not only do physical books increase understanding and comprehension, but they are also preferred among students. A study found that when given the option, it also seems that most students choose to read from printed texts than electronic options (Foasberg, 2014, p. 715). From my own personal experience, I can concur with this finding. The lending library supports what students want and allows them to build their education in the way that is most helpful for them.

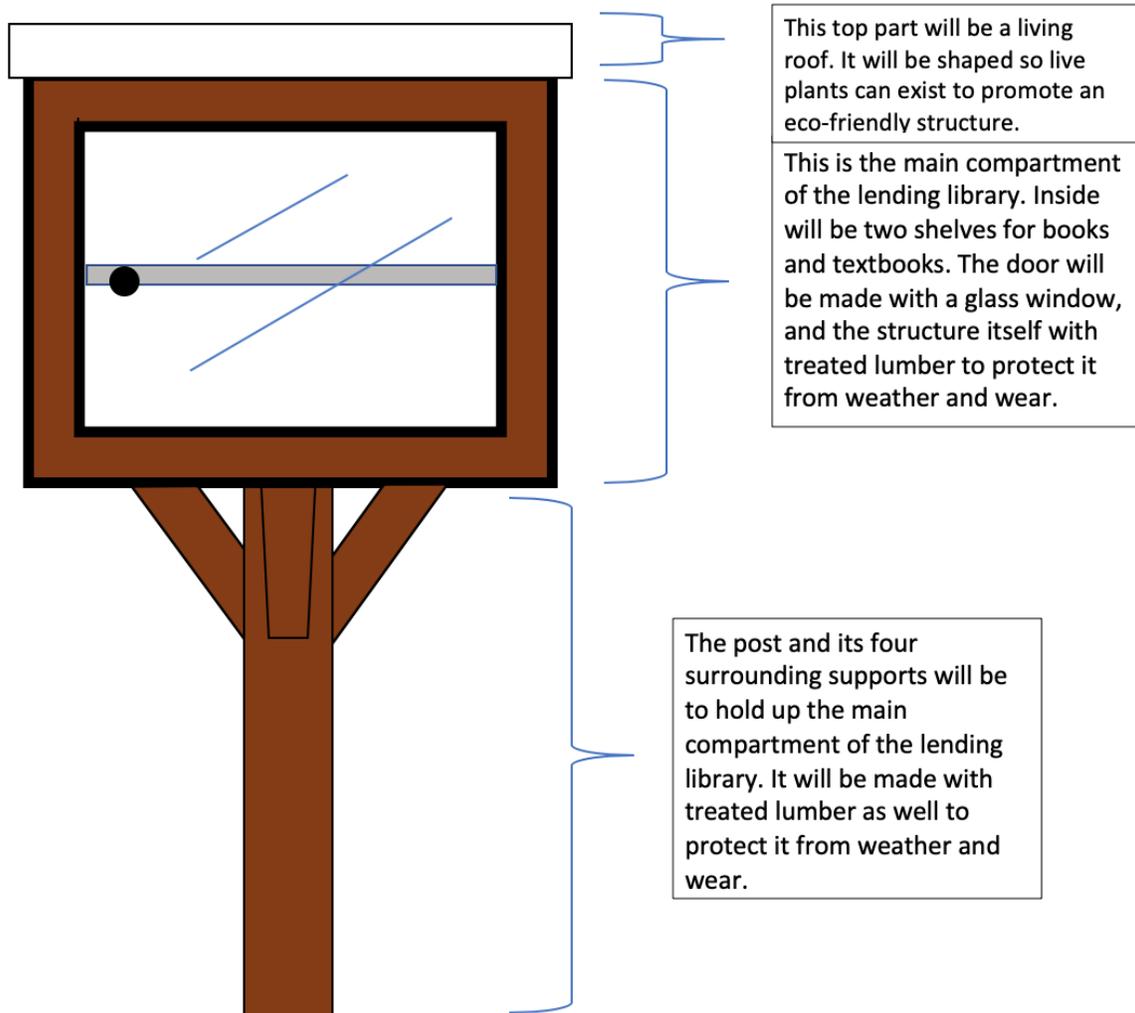
I also asked the question, “What toll are expenses of textbooks taking on students and their academic success?” I was shocked at the information I found. According to Hunsicker-Walburn et al. (2016), a student will spend an average of \$1,122 on course materials every year in the United States (p. 75). If we calculate this number on top of tuition and student loans, the amount of debt the average person will be in by the time they graduate is astronomically high. My hope for the lending library is that it will be a space of not only exchanging printed texts for pleasure, but also texts that support a student’s academics, like used textbooks. This can help

eliminate some the expenses a student has to invest in so they can be successful inside and outside of the classroom.

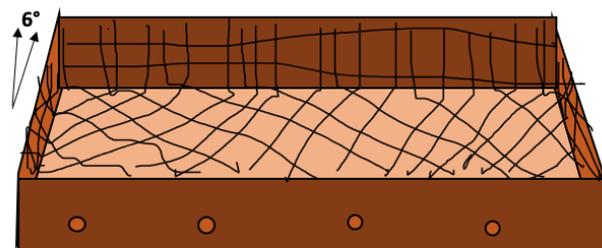
Diving deeper into finding more to answer this question, I began to wonder how exactly the price of textbooks influences the choices college students make in terms of accessing academic materials. One resource suggests that because textbooks are priced so high, 65% of students have stated they do not buy textbooks for their classes anymore (Phagan-Hansel, 2015, p. 11). Since textbooks are priced so high and so many students are turning away from acquiring their course materials, there is a lack of support for students to build on their education which can lead to lower grades. Since the lending library is a free service, students can use their fellow community members for support. I believe that because the lending library provides an opportunity to exchange textbooks, students can find more aid from their fellow classmates without worrying about expenses.

The last question I considered before building the lending library was, “How can we make reading materials more accessible for students on campus?” I have seen many lending libraries throughout my life, but they never registered as more than a fun element at any given location. When I thought about the practicalities of a lending library, I began to understand just how helpful the idea is for an individual. Then I began to think of it from my own perspective as a college student. I grew confident that this would be an incredibly helpful tool in making reading materials more assessable for students on campus. Little Free Library.org (2018) is an organization that helps those who are interested in building a lending library by providing ideas and resources, and they reported that over 120 million books had been exchanged through the lending libraries registered through them. So many people take advantage of the book exchange

process of the lending library, and I felt that this could reflect how college students would react with this opportunity.

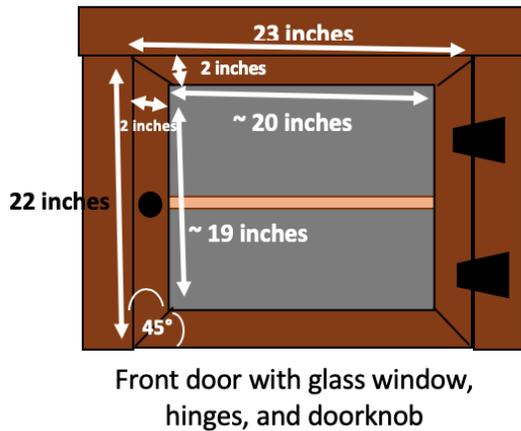


Once I decided what direction I wanted to go for my Honors Project, I began to look for different designs to base my structure from. I found a design by Zimmerman (n.d.) that promised a large space for many books to fit inside. I also wanted to incorporate an element that promoted



Back view of the "living roof."

ecological benefits. Wiking (n.d.) had a wonderful design that contained a “living roof”—where the roof was designed like a flower box to allow for plants to grow. Below and above are a few



images from my blueprint design. The first image is the general design I created, with descriptions for

each component of the structure. The next image

shows what the roof of the library involves, which is a box-like shape lined with visqueen for protecting

the wood and holes drilled into the back to allow for

draining. The image to the left depicts the front of the

library with its approximate measurements and design.

Interdisciplinary:

This Honors Project is interdisciplinary in nature. The problem the lending library tries to find the solution for is the lack of use with both leisure and academic printed materials and the expense of printed materials. The root of the project is based in literature and academics. These are important elements that are centered in college curriculum for ensuring each student is successful and well-rounded before stepping into the real world on their own. However, the execution also involved an artful mind.

Instead of keeping the project research based which would only show results from previous studies and not my own, I decided to add another field of woodworking into the project to answer my questions in a more hands-on and tangible way. This new artistic field produced results that were specific to the students at Bowling Green State University and gave me a better insight into what they liked about the lending library, what they did not like, and any suggestions

that they may want to see incorporated into the project. It also provided a blending of kinesthetic creating and understanding with visual and reading comprehension, which can push achievements in and outside of the classroom.

In order to complete this project, I had to create a blueprint of the lending library, which is something I had never done before in my time of creating art. This was another element that made the project interdisciplinary, as it involved traits of mathematics and architecture. I needed to be precise in my measuring and accurate in my depiction of what I wanted my library to look like in order to create the structure in a way that would best fit the population of Bowling Green. This took new forms of thinking in order to execute the vision properly.

Conclusions:





I built the lending library with the help of a family-friend over the summer of 2020. The stages of construction are shown in the photos above and to the left. During that time as well, I collected used books from friends and myself that were no longer in use or wanted. I brought the library and the books to Bowling Green and it was installed by Campus Operations on the 4th of September. It is located behind the Fine Arts building by the Community Garden.

Here are pictures to see how the library looked after it was installed. As you can see from the photos, the library was



stocked with books and succulents were planted on the roof. With the generosity



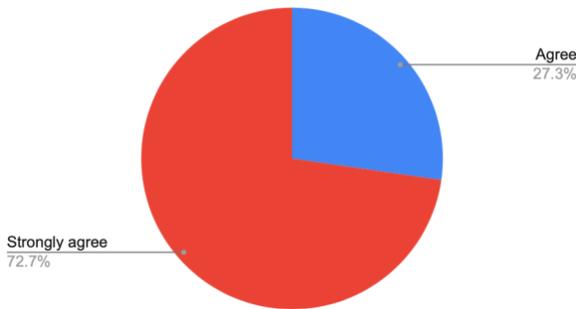
of the Friends of the University Libraries, I was able to fully fund the installation of my project and the materials for the “living roof.” They helped make my vision a reality without the financial pressure that comes with building your dreams. I also \ posted a QR code on the door of the library that led to a survey

(<https://forms.gle/BhAhAH4cczEkrouaA>) asking how students interacted with the library, how they view the library, and if they had any questions, comments, concerns, or suggestions.

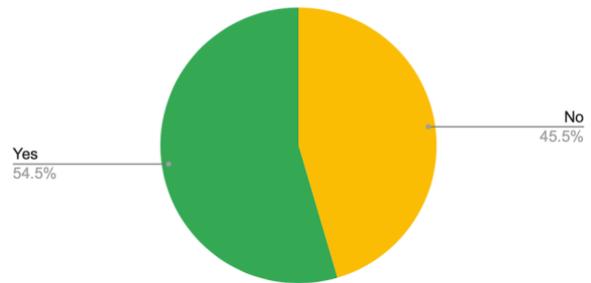


After the first week installation, I already noticed how much books that have been removed and exchanged from the lending library. This is supported by the responses I received on the survey. Three questions were asked on a Likert scale, with options of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Five questions were asked on the basis of Yes or No responses. Below are the results of the survey taken from eleven voluntary responses.

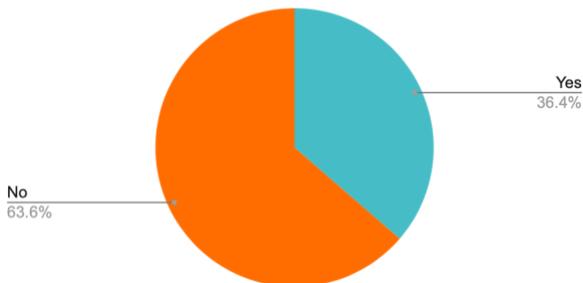
I found this lending library personally very useful.



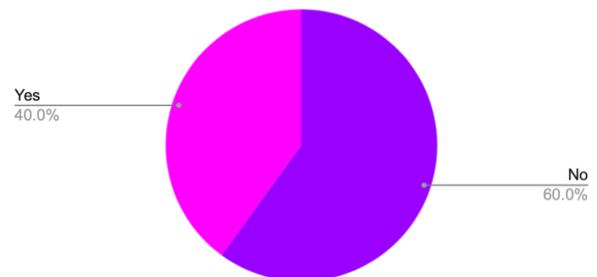
I took a book from this library and replaced it with another book.



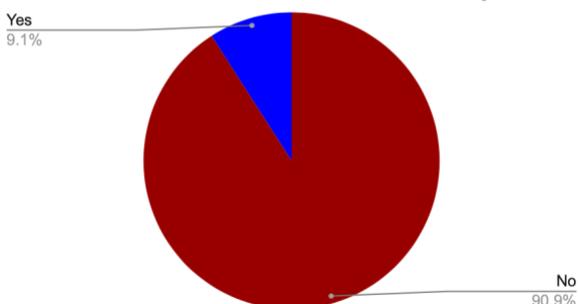
I took a book from this library and did not add another book.



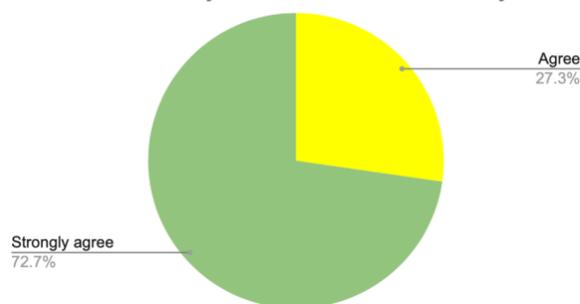
I left a book in this library and did not take a book.



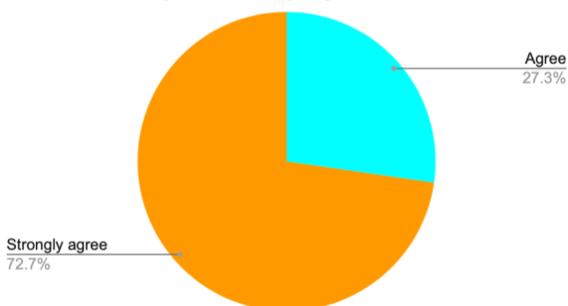
I did not take or leave a book in the library.



I found this library useful for the community.



I plan on using this library again.



I would like to see more than one lending library on Bowling Green's campus.



Looking at the results, we can see that the responses to the Likert scale questions were all positive, as all participants either chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” This shows that the lending library had 100% positive feedback from those who voluntarily completed the survey. If this is a representation of Bowling Green State University as a whole, that would mean all of the members of the student body, faculty, and staff would have positive reactions to the lending library and what it has to offer.

As for the other questions, responses varied. When asked if the participants took and book from the library and replaced it with another one, 54.5% said yes but 45.5% said no. Also, when asked whether they took a book from the library and did not replace it with a new book, 36.4% said yes and 63.6% said no. 40% said that they left a book in the library without taking one, and 60% said they did not. Lastly, 100% of the participants said they would like to see more than one lending library on Bowling Green State University’s campus.

In answer to my research questions, I found that the lending library on campus has allowed for a community-based opportunity to promote reading, sharing, and financial assistance. Overall, the community reacted positively to it. Many of the books that were placed in the library supported leisure reading and academic needs. Also, since the library is a free service, participants did not need to purchase any of the items they wanted. Within days of its installation, many books were already exchanged. It became evident that the lending library on campus provided a service that allowed books and materials to be more accessible to the students and the community.

Project Strengths

This project had many strengths. First, it built on preexisting research in a newer and more tangible way. Its hands-on design made the results in research more clearly visible. I was able to understand why such results existed because of the physicality of the lending library and the immediacy of the results. The lending library also made materials more accessible for all, whether they be a student or a general member of the community. This outlet can help anyone be a more successful and well-rounded individual. The opportunities that the lending library shares include community engagement, lifting of financial burdens, and giving opportunities for learning and understanding a wide range of topics.

As shown through the survey, the lending library received immense support and positive reactions. Many participants praised the library:

“This is such a great idea for BGSU! Everyone loves a free book!”

“I love the lending library! It is in a very nice spot since it is next to the community garden.”

“I love this library! I have dropped off quite a few books of mine and I love coming back and seeing that others have taken them :~) Thanks Lucia!!!!”

“This is an awesome idea. I will come back with a book or more.”

Reading this feedback is heartwarming, as it shows the acceptance and support that the library has received from those in the community. This gives me confidence that the library is appreciated and will be used more in the future.

Project Limitations

With areas of confidence comes areas of growth. For one, there was a lack of control in gathering data. The survey responses were completely voluntary, therefore there was difficulty encourage people to take the survey beyond the paper posted on the library door. Receiving more responses would allow for more well-rounded feedback. Another area that lacked control was how students utilized the library. Some participants only took books instead of exchanging them. Because of this, there has been a lack of materials in the library since its installation. This is something that cannot be helped, since the library is maintained by participation and not by payment or any other required field. Lastly, people took the plants on the roof of the library. In the beginning there were succulents and vines planted in the “living roof.” When checking on the library one week, the plants were gone with no evidence of the wind blowing them away. Other decorations placed on top afterwards, like miniature pumpkins and gourds, were taken as well.

In the survey, some participants also provided suggestions for ways to improve the library or make it more interactive. These suggestions were:

“Don't put books that are a part of a series unless it is the first one!”

“I feel like there should be a better variety of books as I mainly saw contemporary young adult fiction”

“I don’t know if this would be possible since new books are added, but it would be interesting if there could be a log of books brought in/borrowed to get a community perspective of who is benefiting! Plus, it’s just cool to see where the books have gone/come from.”

“Allow people to write their names and date that the book was taken so you can keep a log on who has read the book. ‘sisterhood of the traveling book’”

I found these suggestions very interesting and useful. Although some of them are difficult to address because they are not something easily controlled, others would promote more community engagement with the library and provide a space to understand the impact the lending library makes more tangibly.

Additional Information

This lending library project was designed spring 2020, built summer 2020, and analyzed fall 2020. Campus Operations assisted in the installation of the lending library, and the Friends of the University Libraries funded this as well as the “living roof” materials. Campus Updates and social media were used to promote the library throughout the semester. Creating this lending library has been an honor and leaving this legacy behind at Bowling Green State University is very meaningful to me. I hope that this library will be supported for years to come, and that it in turn will benefit any and every community member who finds joy in using this outlet of an eternal exchange of knowledge and love.

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