Babies and Generals in the Library: Challenges and Opportunities for Dual Mission Special Academic Libraries

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Abstract

Weekly Storytime activities, crying babies, and inquisitive toddlers are a common occurrence in any public library, but not often found in an academic or research library. At the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, however, it is a highly routine scene as it operates as a dual mission special academic library – serving both graduate level Army officers and historical researchers, but also spouses, children, and community patrons. Serving such a dual population presents many challenges but also many rewards as well.

Drawing upon data collected, personal experiences, and historical research, this paper will present the challenges and the successes of the librarians and volunteers at the Combined Arms Research Library in meeting the information and research needs of patrons from one-month old infants to high school students to four-star generals.

Introduction

While academic libraries have grown from silent, study repositories to animated, coffee shop centers of collaboration, there still remains a quiet, studious persona that the academic library must uphold. For dual mission special libraries that uniquely serve both academic along with community populations, there are many challenges that arise in meeting the needs of their diverse patrons while maintaining their educational environment. This is a particularly unique public service situation for military libraries, especially the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The CARL is the primary academic library for the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, providing reference and research services to graduate level officers, but also to their families and the entire Fort Leavenworth community as well. The CARL not only serves officers writing their master's theses but also historians using the vast resources of the Archives and Special Collections. Alongside those scholars are baby strollers and inquisitive toddlers as it also operates as the community and family library for spouses and children, providing weekly Storytime activities, summer reading program initiatives, and housing an entirely separate children's room and YA collection. This vastly integrated and unique library setting provides staff distinct public service opportunities and rewards as well.

CARL: The Academic Library

The Combined Arms Research Library (CARL) at Fort Leavenworth has been in operation (for the most part) since 1881 as the primary academic library to support the operations of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). While first beginning as basically a repository of government publications and curriculum records since the founding of the CGSC, it has grown to that of one of the Army's pre-eminent collections for military research and archival documents. Officially designated in 1977 as the Combined Arms Research Library, its purpose and mission is to provide access to and maintain library collections, and provide reference and research services to the students, faculty, and staff of the CGSC which consists mostly of graduate (masters) level Army officers. The CGSC is made up of four primary schools and the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) is the one most commonly and historically referred to as simply "CGSC." It is the largest of the four schools, each year providing masters-level curriculum and instruction through to nearly 5,000 U.S. Army majors, along with the equivalent rank of major from Sister Services (Air Force, Navy, Marines), and Interagency personnel, including those at three satellite campuses and via distance learning (United States Army 2016). It also has a noteworthy contingency of approximately over 100 international military students that attend each year from over 80 countries (Sarles 2017).

The Command and General Staff College is the oldest of the Army's advanced schools and considered the "keystone of the Army educational system" (Public Information Office n.d.). Officers attend CGSC at what is considered the "turning point" in their Army career—about ten years into their Army tenure when they have decided to make the Army their profession and "have clearly demonstrated their potential for assignment to high command or staff positions. It serves both as a reward and as a stepping stone for further advancement for all Army officers" (Public Information Office n.d.). Attending CGSC is considered quite an accomplishment as it is a selection process—officers accepted have been selected to continue on in their Army education and continue their service in the Army most likely until retirement at 20 years or beyond until higher promotion levels such as colonel and general. The CGSC operates as graduate school, a military school, but also as the key educational institution that will prepare "officers for the next 5-10 years of their career" (Command and General Staff College Foundation 2015). It is a school where every nearly every famous general officer in the Army of the 20th Century has graduated including such generals as Douglas MacArthur, Dwight D. Eisenhower, George Patton, Omar Bradley, Colin Powell, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, and David Petraeus.

Army officers attending CGSC are taught to be "adaptive leaders, capable of critical thinking, and prepared to operate in full-spectrum Army, joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational environments" (Command and General Staff College Foundation 2015). To accomplish such an all-encompassing education, they study a variety of subjects including military history, philosophy, tactics, leadership, ethics, joint and Army planning, and force management. Students also have the option to write a master's thesis to obtain the degree of Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS). CGSC students can also be civilians from other U.S. governmental/federal agencies.

Another primary population within CGSC that CARL serves is the students of the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). This school consists of approximately 150 students that

have just completed CGSS and want to complete further, more specialized study consisting of advanced military strategy and planning. Upon completion of this program along with a written thesis and oral comprehensive exam, they earn an MMAS.

Along with those school programs, the CARL also provides reference and research support and services to CGSC faculty, support personnel, and faculty and staff of The Army University (an administrative level unit that oversees the educational arm of the U.S. Army). It also supports the officers and soldiers of the Fort Leavenworth Garrison, including the Munson Army Health Center, the 15th MP Brigade, the United States Disciplinary Barracks, and various other units operating on the military post but that are not affiliated with CGSC. In total, the CARL supports an installation of approximately 5,400 active duty Army personnel; 5,200 family members; and 2,150 civilians (MyBaseGuide 2014).

While the vast majority of officer ranks served by the CARL is that of captain and major, it also serves some lieutenant colonels in some specialized programs as well as those attending the School of Command Preparation (SCP). The SCP provides a two-week instruction course to lieutenant colonels and colonels (and their spouses) about to take command of a battalion or brigade. There are also colonels and generals on post that use the services of the CARL in their commands such as the one-star general in charge of The Army University, and three-star general in charge of the entire CGSC and military post.

CARL: The Dual Mission

Along with serving such a heavy academic population, since 1995, the CARL has also supported the community library needs of the families and civilians of Fort Leavenworth. Most Army installations have a library operated under the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) program to provide library services to all post personnel, but most specifically families, most similar to how a public library functions. There are seventy MWR libraries that operate across seven countries, "supporting a worldwide network of Soldiers, Families, Veterans, and DOD Civilians" (U.S. Army Installation Management Command n.d.). Services include not only those of a physical library (usually known as the "post library"), but also a digital library with article databases, e-books and e-audio books, auto repair resources, investment tools, military training resources, tutoring help, and children's e-books and magazines. The digital library known as the "MWR Enterprise Web" is accessible worldwide, 24 hours/day. Use of such facilities is authorized to such personnel as active duty service members, reservists, service academy cadets, veterans, and their family members; as well as Department of the Army (DA) civilians and their families (U.S. Department of the Army 2010).

MWR Libraries operate separately in facilities, collections, and funding from other Army libraries that support specific education schools and training programs such as CGSC (Military OneSource 2016). There are only three limited exceptions to this delineated operation, however, and one is that of the CARL. Originally, an MWR library existed at Fort Leavenworth until 1995, when due to funding cuts its operations ceased and its collections consolidated into the CARL; one of the first consolidations of academic and post libraries within the Army academic library system (United States Army Combined Arms Center 2018). The CARL took on its collections and mission to continue to support community patrons alongside their existing

academic patrons. Taking on these collections and programs has presented a unique opportunity for both staff and patrons but also many challenges as well.

CHALLENGES

While almost all MWR/community libraries operate completely separate from any academic libraries at military installations, there are a few exceptions in addition to the CARL. Academic military libraries at Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Lee operate both mixed MWR and academic libraries, however, the difference is in that they are collocated rather than truly combined; they are located within the same building, but still separately operated, staffed, and funded. This presents the CARL, operating as a truly combined MWR/academic library, with several challenges unique from any other Army library. The following details some of the most pertinent challenges of meeting CARL's dual mission.

Staffing

One of the greatest challenges to any library but especially because of the dual mission of the CARL is staffing. The CARL has approximately sixteen librarians (currently three vacancies), eleven library technicians/support staff (currently one vacancy), and is augmented by six regularly scheduled volunteers. Of those, only one staff member, a library technician (who, for the purposes of this paper will be referred to as the "community library technician"), is tasked in a position description with a regular duty of providing community programs, even though no MWR funding is provided to support this position. Although this technician has principal duties staffing the Circulation Desk, including routine shelving and shelf-reading, this technician also has primary duties that involve leading and developing the programming for the children's and community events along with coordinating the library volunteer program. With numerous community events that involve more than one staff member, it is impossible for this one person to do it all. To meet this challenge, a willing and supportive staff is needed and required.

While all librarians of the CARL are dedicated to their academic work, they are also very dedicated in contributing to the MWR mission, which can include such events as weekly Storytime, Summer Reading Program and National Library Week initiatives, and other special events such as Talk Like a Pirate Day. In planning and coordinating the necessary staff to help support and execute these MWR activities, the community library technician will usually send out a call for volunteers to all the staff before each event. Those librarians and technicians interested in assisting can then respond and determine in what part of the event or program they want to assist—whether that be preparing craft materials and giveaways ahead of time, or actually providing hands-on assistance during the event, or in many cases—both. The CARL also greatly relies on its library volunteers, who routinely also assist in the MWR programs.

One of the greatest challenges in terms of staffing, but key to the success of the community and family programming, is the time involved in preparation. Most community events involve anywhere from one to fifteen hours of preparation time and includes such work as assigning personnel to various duties and stations, preparing giveaways and prizes, decorating the library, making displays, finding books to read aloud, and arranging for special guests and presenters such as musicians, artists, and science demonstrations. The community library

technician usually coordinates and directs each event or program, but at any time a librarian or other staff member must be ready to step in and lead the event in the technician's place if the technician is out due to illness or other obligations. The CARL has met these staffing challenges with a highly dedicated and willing team who see the importance of providing these services to their soldiers, their families, and also civilians.

Marketing

An essential aspect of providing community events in a dual mission library is creating the necessary marketing materials to advertise and showcase each event. This can involve any number of formats and venues such as the CARL's Web page, FaceBook, MWR FaceBook, digital signage on the library's kiosks, displays and exhibits, printed flyers, and more. The community library technician at the CARL finds most success using Facebook with occasional printed flyers. The technician has found the event invitation feature on Facebook to be highly useful in determining how many children and adults may be attending an event.

Another avenue the CARL participates in for marketing purposes is through a post-wide event called Pair Day, held twice a year on a Saturday from 10am-2pm. This event is an organizational fair where post and community organizations set up displays, tables, and activities to help promote and showcase their services to Army personnel, their families, and also DA civilians. The CARL attends each Pair Day, setting up a table display with brochures and flyers advertising their resources, as well as promotional handouts such as pens, magnets, and children's items such as prizes, games, t-shirts, and book bags. This event is usually staffed by one librarian along with the community library technician and involves about two hours of preparation. It is very well attended by Army personnel, spouses, children, and DA civilians. On average, the CARL usually makes some basic contact with 1000-1300 people at the event.

Funding

Financial support is often a cornerstone in sustaining such a quality and high level of community programming in any library, which is a key difference at the CARL. The CARL receives no local MWR funding (at the post level), however, it does receive some funding from MWR at the national level to buy prizes and incentives for the Summer Reading Program each year. It also receives certain items purchased by MWR considered directly mission related such as books from the Chief of Staff Reading List, books for staff about hosting good library story times, puppets, test preparation books, and more. It varies slightly each year.

Additionally, the CARL receives access to those databases in the MWR Enterprise Web suite of electronic resources, just as would be available in any MWR Library. This is a significant benefit to the CARL as it is an additional source of e-resources the CARL does not have to purchase in addition to its own academic databases, and which are more focused toward public/community patrons. In addition, the CARL receives access to some e-book resources via the Kansas State Library, available to all residents of Kansas, including military who may be stationed there. This sharing of electronic resources highlights how a unique funding challenge to the CARL's dual mission has been met to successfully integrate the public/community library and the academic library.

The Academic Persona: Facilities

Maintaining the academic persona is another challenge with the dual mission of the CARL. With a facility housing one of the most prestigious U.S. Army academic library collections alongside an extensively used children's library, it involves a significant effort achieving the two to co-exist. To assist in this challenge, the CARL underwent a significant renovation from 2010-2013 and the facilities were re-arranged in such a way to try and mitigate noisy toddlers with master's student research. The children's library, which used to be alongside study carrels, was moved from the second floor to the first and is entirely enclosed with glass walls and doors that keep noise relatively limited to that room. It is now located fairly close to both entrances so babies and strollers do not have to trek through too many quiet researchers to get to their collections and Storytime activities. The first floor is considered the more "noisy" floor as it is in many academic libraries, housing the family/community patron computers along with the public service desks of Reference and Circulation. The second floor houses the Main Collection (non-fiction works) and private study carrels for SAMS students and is usually maintained as a quieter, study atmosphere.

Even though there is this separation in collections by floor and the children's library walls, it is very common for crying babies and cranky toddlers to be using the services and the facilities of the CARL alongside scholars poised to be the next advanced leaders in the Army and even some becoming general officers. For the staff, it is a very unique mix of patrons to work with as well. One minute they are providing graduate level scholarly military research to Army majors and the next they are recommending the next Beginning Reader series of books to an engaged six-year old, or the next dystopian series of books to an enquiring young adult. It remains a fascinating and so far, pleasant and rewarding relationship.

Technology

Accessible technology is essential in any library but one that especially plays into the challenges of a dual mission military library. The CARL must maintain secured network technology accessible to only personnel with security clearances and Common Access Cards, but also technology that is accessible to family and community members who do not. While usually most military academic libraries maintain a certain number of non-secure network computers for transitioning soldiers and civilians conducting training to obtain their clearances, the need is much greater at the CARL where so many of their patrons do not have clearances for secure network access. The CARL maintains approximately thirty-two computers for public and family use including some of those being reserved for use of the online catalog only. The challenge in maintaining these additional computers not only involves extra staff time and attention, but also access to a commercial Internet network (i.e., such as a cable/internet company would provide).

SUCCESSES & REWARDS

The challenges of operating a dual mission special academic library can be daunting, but they are often outweighed by the successful and rewarding opportunities, and positive relationships developed with the entire post community. The following highlights some of the most successful programs at the CARL for family and civilian patrons.

Weekly Storytime

One of the most successful and rewarding aspects of the integrated nature of the CARL's dual mission is its weekly Storytime activities. Led by the community library technician along with one library volunteer, Storytime occurs every Wednesday at 9:30am, beginning with a group song, then usually two stories read aloud by the technician or a librarian, followed by a craft. Storytimes at the CARL center on a theme for the month such as colors and shapes, sports, music, superheroes, etc. Preparation involves selecting stories to read aloud, preparing a craft activity and materials; then about one hour for the event, followed by one hour to clean-up. This involves other staff and volunteers at times to cover if the community library technician is out for any reason and/or needs assistance. The CARL averages about eighteen children per Storytime, not including parents or caretakers. However, on any one day, there can be as many as thirty children, plus adults.

While Storytime is going on in the children's library, just outside of it research is being conducting by field grade (majors and above) Army officers in uniform for CGSC classes and masters theses. One of these researchers may eventually emerge as the next general officer. It is an intriguing dichotomy to observe firsthand and exemplifies the success of the CARL at integrating the needs of its public library patrons while preserving its primary mission as that of a historic academic research library.

Summer Reading Program

One of the most extensive and involved of all community activities, but one of the most rewarding, centers around the Summer Reading Program initiatives. Beginning with a Kick-Off Party in late May and ending with a Wrap-Up Party at the end of July, this program is the most staff intensive since it is over a longer period of time and because it involves nearly all staff who at any one time may be staffing the Circulation Desk. At any time during the week, children can come to the Circulation Desk to claim their prize for that week. Any staff member working the Circulation Desk at that time needs to be aware of how to record the child's reading progress and award prizes, which involves on average about forty-five participants per week. This became even more involved as it moved to an online system in the summer of 2017.

The Summer Reading Program (SRP) Kick-off Party is the most complex in terms of organizing and planning due to its popularity and the large number of children that may attend which can be up to as many as 120 on average, not including parents. The SRP Kick-off Party is led by the community library technician who is responsible for preparing and organizing the giveaways and prizes for the event; this includes preparing at least 200 starter bags that will be given out to each child in attendance. This involves on average twelve to fifteen hours of preparation time and the assistance of two to three other staff members and/or one or two volunteers. The technician is responsible for finding entertainment for the event such as local musical groups, science presenters, and artists, in addition to asking staff to help and assigning them duties, developing crafts, finding books to be read aloud, organizing contests, and assembling prizes. To execute the event involves on average about seven to nine staff members, including five or six to work stations and two to three to cover the Circulation Desk; which averages in total about five librarians and two to four library technicians, and usually at least one

volunteer. The Kick-off Party is always scheduled on a Friday where the post schools release early so that children of all ages can attend; usually scheduled from 2:00-4:00pm. The event runs about two to three hours, with about an hour of additional time spent afterwards for clean-up.

The SRP concludes in late July with a Wrap-up/Final Party similar to that of the Kick-off Party but on a slightly smaller scale. It usually involves more final prizes and giveaways, however, as there is a raffle for books and more significant prize items as a reward for all children who have participated in the summer-long program. Usually some sort of entertainer is hired for the party so it involves fewer staff members. Overall, preparation time is about six to eight hours, with the event lasting two hours. The Wrap-up Party is usually executed by about five staff members and sometimes a library volunteer.

Talk Like a Pirate Day

First initiated by a CARL reference librarian, the Talk Like a Pirate Day tradition is one of the CARL's longest and most continually successful community initiatives, going back to 2004. The event stems from the "International Talk Like a Pirate Day," officially organized and celebrated since 2002 and originated by John Baur and Mark Summers. At the CARL, Talk Like a Pirate Day includes decorating the library in pirated-themed items, telling pirate jokes and stories, and dressing up in pirate costumes. It has been credited as being an "excellent way to augment [its] Storytime themes because it is so much fun for everyone" (Burnett 2017). Similar to SRP events, Talk Like a Pirate Day activities usually involve about fifteen hours of preparation and are coordinated and led by the community library technician and a reference librarian, assisted by several CARL staff members and volunteers. The event usually lasts two hours and consists of a pirate-themed Storytime, costume contest, and most recently in 2017, breaking a pirate ship-shaped piñata filled with candy. Averaging about seventy-five attendees each year, it is known to be one of the more noisy, fun, and boisterous events of all the community programs. As one spouse who brought her three children to the event in 2017 notes "Our boys are likely wondering how it is possible to have something so loud in a library" (Burnett 2017). This statement exemplifies how the CARL has integrated these events so well into its dual mission operations.

Book Club Kits

A new addition to the CARL's community programs in 2017 was the implementation of Book Club Kits, developed in coordination with and also funded by the CGSC Foundation. These kits are available for check-out and contain about 5-10 copies of each book along with a discussion guide which gives a description about the book and author, along with discussion questions. Some kits are for families to read together and some are for typical book club groups. This initiative involved one librarian to prepare and plan along with assistance from staff members in Acquisitions and Cataloging to process and catalog the kits, and also members in Circulation to shelve the kits. To prepare the first four kits took about fifteen hours of planning since it was new and decisions needed to be made on what containers to put them in, what to include in them, and where to shelve them. This is another unique example of the CARL's dual mission in that most academic and especially military academic libraries do not offer such a community service.

Unique Collections

While one would expect to find a widespread collection of children's books, YA books, and DVDs in any public library for the most part, these collections would most certainly not be expected in an academic library setting. The CARL, however, has excelled in providing its patrons with extensive scholarly materials, as well as popular collections—ranging all the way from military theory to the latest popular mystery and fiction novels, to graphic novels, to young adult dystopian series, down to picture and board books for children and toddlers. CARL librarians have succeeded in striking a balance in selecting and maintaining a current and useful popular collection for family patrons, while not allowing this to overtake the focus on academic collection development.

Augmenting its solid popular print collections, the CARL also features a robust DVD collection that is highly used by both the academic and community patrons. Focusing on its academic mission, it has a significant non-fiction educational collection featuring history, military, and PBS productions. While for the community mission, it features popular TV series, children's movies, dramas, comedies, actions, and mysteries. While such an academic library is not meant to be a Netflix or DVD rental store, the community uses it significantly and greatly appreciates it. They are often extremely surprised that there is such an extensive collection for them to use for free as library patrons.

It is almost difficult to imagine, that just two floors away from the children's library and popular DVD collection, contains the CARL's Archives and Special Collections. Located on a classified floor where entrance is only allowed for those with a Secret Security Clearance, it is mostly limited to Army personnel conducting research for MMAS theses and history papers or DA civilians and researchers. The Archives houses such unique materials as maps used in WWII by German staff officers, Classified war documents, CGSC theses and SAMS monographs, and various other specialized military and government documents. Additionally, the Archives operates the CARL's Digital Library which hosts documents digitized on a variety of topics including student papers produced at the CGSC, Fort Leavenworth history documents, obsolete military manuals, general military history publications, Frontier Army Museum materials, and more. They also partner with and host the digital collections of seven other Army academic libraries.

Staff and Family Partnership

One of the greatest rewards of all in serving the dual mission between the academic library and community library is the positive relationship that evolves amongst the library staff, their patrons, and the overall military installation. CARL staff are often recognized by exceedingly grateful and complimentary parents and children, along with appreciative soldiers, officers, and commanders as they attend to both their personal academic needs along with their family's as well. It is a strong collaboration and partnership that is a positive reflection on the Army and also the library profession.

Because of the requirements to serve both academic and community populations, the staff must demonstrate a unique blend of abilities. They cover traditional positions in an academic

library such as Reference and Circulation but also engage in children's activities. Even the Archivists and Systems Librarians participate in numerous children's and community programs as well as help cover Reference and Circulation as needed. Because of this, the CARL has a particularly diversified staff where staff members can fill in at a variety of roles and stations as needed.

Conclusion

While the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library is most notable for its unique and high quality military academic collections, it has also thrived as a public library for the entire Fort Leavenworth community. For over twenty years, its staff has faced challenges in adopting and meeting the mission of the MWR/community library, such as staffing, funding, and facilities, but it has also received many rewards from it as well, including a strong relationship with the post families, and highly thankful commanders. It has an exclusive reputation as being not only the pre-eminent Army academic and historical library, serving soldiers and officers of all ranks including four-star generals, but also babies and toddlers as well. While the dual mission of the CARL remains highly unique and challenging, it continues to meet its duty in a way that exemplifies the library profession, the Army, and the civilian community.

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