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Washburn University: A Community Analysis

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### Abstract

Washburn University, located in Topeka, Kansas, has historically been known as a non-traditional school community. By looking at the demographics of Washburn, it has become apparent that the university has steadily become of interest to traditional students. In this community analysis, it was necessary to discover what the differences were between the two groups and what trends Washburn were employing to accommodate the needs in information searches for all types of students. By using the community analysis, it helped to understand not only the library usages of the Washburn students, but also the community that helps to shape Washburn.

## Washburn University: A Community Analysis

### History

Washburn University is located in Topeka, Kansas. The website for Washburn University (n.d.) reports it began as Lincoln College in 1865 and was located in downtown Topeka. In 1868, Ichabod Washburn donated \$25,000 to the college and the name was officially changed to Washburn College in recognition of the gift. The college was moved to the present 160 acre site with occupancy taking place in 1874. In 1941, the Board of Regents was established to govern the college, and in 1952, they changed the college's name to Washburn University of Topeka (n.p.). Today it has more than one million square feet of academic learning environments and offers, as Washburn University (n.d.) states, "more than 190 certificate, associate, baccalaureate, master's and juris doctor programs through the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Law, Business, Nursing and Applied Studies" (n.p.). There are also two libraries located on campus: Mabee Library and the Washburn Law Library. At present, Washburn has in excess of 7,000 students enrolled in courses.

With Washburn University located in the center of Topeka, it is apparent education has played an important role throughout the development of the city, from 1854, when Topeka was founded, to the present. Washburn University is not the only example of Topeka's commitment to education as at present there are as many as forty nine public and private elementary schools, eight high schools, and five vocational schools.

Historically, as Chubb and DeDonder (2008) tell us, Topeka made national headlines in 1954 about education regarding the Brown v. Board Supreme Court decision that ended segregation in the nation's public schools. Again, Topeka was advanced compared to other cities because this decision only applied to the public elementary schools, as Topeka High School had been fully integrated since the late 1890s. Topeka was also home to the College of the Sisters of

Bethany, which was established in 1860. At the time, such opportunities for women to go to school were uncommon and it provided a chance for the women of Topeka to obtain an education of a higher degree (n.p.).

## Demographics

### Population

Information in the following section was obtained from the United States Census Bureau (2007). Topeka has approximately 122,642 people living in the area and takes up much of Shawnee County. Of that number, Washburn University has 7,153 people enrolled in classes for the 2008-2009 fiscal year, and employs 2,100 people as staff and faculty. Washburn University provides education and employment to roughly eight percent of the population of Topeka. The city of Topeka has had an increase of 265 people between the years 2000 and 2007, the date of the last census taking.

The largest age group of people living in the Topeka community is between 35 and 54 years old with 27.3% in this range. The next largest is between 20 and 24 with 22.4% of people in this age group. This trend of young adult to middle age people representing the major population of people in Topeka addresses the student number enrolled in Washburn. Although not all students that go to school at Washburn have grown up in Topeka, most that choose to go to Washburn do reside in Topeka, adding to the current population. Topeka is also home to 19.1% of infant to 14 year olds, 5.9% of 15 to 19 year olds, 11.3% of 55 to 64 year olds, and 14.9% of 65 and older residents.

The largest population in Topeka by race is Caucasian, which consists of 71% people. African/American people number 11%, Hispanics total 10%, and both Asian and Native American total 1% each of Topeka's population. Roughly another 6% make up the "other"

populace. In comparison, of the 7,153 people enrolled at Washburn, as the U.S. University Directory (n.d.) reports, 3,012 are Caucasian, 225 are African/American, 162 are Hispanic, 68 are Native American, and 52 are Asian. More than half of the students, 3,531 people, have no race affiliation listed (n.p.).

## **Employment**

Information in the following section was obtained from the United States Census Bureau (2007). Topeka's median income was roughly \$49,349 per family, which is classified as a family living under one roof who are related by birth, marriage or adoption. Its median household income is \$38,186. A household is defined as all people living under one roof as their usual place of residence, related or not.

There are three main industries that support Topeka's employment. One is managerial occupations, which is provided by the State of Kansas, Washburn University and other professional employers, and employs 19,934 people. The next is retail, which provides service to all residents to Shawnee County and many surrounding communities, and is comprised of 16,001 employees. Lastly are professional occupations which represent computer, architectural, legal, education, and the health care fields. This industry consists of 12,115 people.

The amount of families in Topeka that are below the poverty level is 13%, according to the 2007 census. That means of the 118,463 people surveyed, 19,977 were not meeting the required amount to be above poverty. This statistic is for all types of families, whether it is families with two wage earners, or a single parent home. This also includes families that have extended relatives living under one roof, and children.

In Topeka, 62,776 people included in the population of 16 years or older are employed. There are, however, 7.1% of Shawnee County residents that are not employed in the 16 years or

older range. Government, health care and education are the three largest areas of employment with the State of Kansas employing 8,436 people, Stormont Vail employing 3,500 people, and USD 501 employing 2,300. Washburn University ranks in the top 10, employing about 1,500 people.

## **Housing**

Information in the following section was obtained from the United States Census Bureau (2007). Topeka's housing market boasts 58,812 structures, with 53,100 being occupied and 5,712 vacant. Single unit houses are the most common, comprising 63.1% of the total housing market. Topeka seems to have two periods of prolific housing construction with 17.9% of houses built before 1939, and 17.4% built between 1970 and 1979. Of the single unit houses, 37.3% are standard with three bedrooms.

The majority of home-owners in Topeka occupy their homes. They comprise 60.9%, while 39.1% own their homes but decide to rent it out to other individuals. Topeka has seen the most home ownership take place between 2000 and 2004 with 30.6% of people buying houses between those years. The median price of houses in Topeka is \$88,500. Interestingly, with a median house price being only almost \$90,000, there are 49 houses in the Topeka area that are worth more than \$1,000,000. This shows some people in Topeka are taking advantage of its below-average cost of living.

Washburn University also covers the housing market by including on-campus dormitories or an apartment setting in the Washburn Village. As stated by Washburn University (n.d.), the Washburn dorms consist of three different residence halls and can house approximately 482 students that are enrolled in class each semester. Students can be any grade level, from a freshman to a senior, and the cost is \$2590 to \$3178 depending on the type of room that is

requested. The Washburn Village is apartment style living and is reserved for full-time students that have completed their freshman year. The cost is \$3,348 per each academic year for rent and can accommodate 192 students per year. Regardless of which living situation a student chooses, he or she must also have a meal plan per year that accompanies their housing. This meal plan gives the student access to the Union Market, Corner Store and most vending machines for about \$2,500 per year (n.p.).

### **Activities**

Topeka is home to many community resources that make the city a vibrant and educational place to live. Topeka has four local newspapers, 10 radio stations, five television stations, and numerous book, video and music stores. Topeka also has cultural amenities to delight local residents such as access to eight different libraries, seven museums, the state capitol building, and many local and chain restaurants. There are many local sports teams for young children to join and professional teams to watch like ice hockey, and many volunteer opportunities to become involved in, such as the Helping Hands Humane Society (HHHS), United Way, the Salvation Army, and others. For artistic leisure activities, Topeka is home to the Topeka Civic Theatre Academy (TCTA), the Topeka Performing Arts Center (TPAC), and the Helen Hocker Theatre which caters to aspiring child actors.

It is not uncommon to see many Topekans outside year round. With mild temperatures in the spring and fall, and somewhat hot temperatures in the summer it is perfect weather to enjoy all the outdoor activities Topeka has to offer. As reported by the Capital Journal (2006), Topeka has “over 90 parks offering fishing, hunting, boating, hiking, jogging, soccer, softball, tennis, community centers, swimming pools, and over a half-dozen public and private golf courses in the city” (p. 2).

Washburn University contributes to local Topeka activities by providing the local campus Mulvane Art Museum to residents as an art resource. As Washburn University (n.d.) reports, “Founded in 1922, Mulvane Art Museum is Kansas’ oldest art museum” (n.p.). It houses roughly 3,000 objects in its permanent collection and has other rotating displays from students and local artists. Washburn is also home to the Andrew J. and Georgia Neese-Gray Theatre in which college students put theory and practice to the test for the public, offering theatrical performances as a cultural resource.

### **Needs Assessment**

Washburn University has been known in the past as a primarily non-traditional university, catering mainly to students that were older, with families and full-time jobs. While Washburn continues to have a large non-traditional student population, it is important to look at the traditional students coming to Washburn straight from high school. The reputation of being a non-traditional school has been challenged in the last 10 years, with more and more high school graduates opting to attend college at a school also known for its small student-teacher ratio and friendly atmosphere.

Assessing the Washburn undergraduate community needs concerning the usage of Mabee Library is important because it does cater to two distinct types of student population. How Mabee interacts with the lifestyles of campus dorm inhabitants, or the person who drives 20 miles to get to the library, is paramount because of the impact the library will lend to an information search. It is important to note, as explained in the CAMEO Handbook, Mabee Library would be described as a research center in that it “assists scholars and researchers as they conduct in-depth studies, investigate specific areas of knowledge, and create new knowledge” (ch. 4). The major points of this assessment are:



- To determine the demographics of Washburn's undergraduate students.
- To see how Mabee caters to both types of students.
- To hear what the students have to say about Mabee and its current services.
- To illicit responses from students on ways of improving services.
- To create a plan of action on new ways of nurturing educations for both types of students.

### **Analysis**

Of the 20 students surveyed for this assessment, 40% were living with a significant other, 30% were living by themselves, and only one person was living with a roommate, something that seems atypical of a traditional student. The majority of survey takers live less than five miles from campus at 61%, and the overwhelming mass, 90%, do not live in on-campus housing. Of the participants, 40% own their own home, 25% rent a house, 25% live with family members, and only one actually lives in the dorms. Interestingly, 60% of the survey takers would describe themselves as non-traditional, and the other 40% would say they are traditional.

Washburn University is known for its large international student population. Washburn is even part of a sister school program with a university in Japan, Fukuoka University. This is interesting because even though 45% of survey takers stated they were from Kansas, 35% were from a foreign country, which included Tajikistan, South Korea, Uganda, Macedonia, Paraguay, Honduras, and Turkey. As far as race, an overwhelming amount, 71%, most identified with being Caucasian.

As far as employment goes, most survey takers, 80%, made less than \$30,000 currently. Only four respondents made between \$30,000 and \$70,000. No one made more than the \$70,000 category. All survey takers were employed with 55% having part time jobs, and 45% having full time jobs.

Mabee Library does cater to both traditional and non-traditional students, but it does so by incorporating different strategies for each group. For the non-traditional students, Mabee is open 24 hours during finals week and does send out emails advertising this feature. Complaints had been lodged previously by students that Mabee was not open during times convenient for a person who works Monday through Friday, 8:00 to 5:00. This 24 hour policy was enacted to fit the library and its services into their busy lives. Mabee Library is also open on the weekends, although only certain hours. Thirty five percent of students surveyed utilized this feature.

For the traditional students, Mabee library has incorporated some exciting new ways to bring students in to the library. They now have the iRead program, where one book is selected and students have the opportunity to discuss the readings. Mabee Library will also try to have the author come in, do a book signing and answer questions from the students. Unfortunately, since this feature is still new, 85% of students surveyed had not heard of iRead. Mabee Library also used the approach of having the 2008 Presidential debates broadcast live on televisions stationed throughout the library so students could watch and debate amongst themselves the race for the White House.

Another aspect Mabee Library is working on that will benefit all students is the new online catalog called Encore. It should resonate with the younger students because it has a Google like one line search bar, instead of the basic subject, title, keyword and author searching. It has community tag clouds, much like Amazon, pictures of the book jackets, multi-faceted searching, and a “did you mean..?” function for misspellings. Fifty five percent of students surveyed had never heard of Encore and are still using the old catalog to search.

Mabee Library’s current services leave the majority of students surveyed satisfied although some see areas that can use some improving, as the graph below will show.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Courteous Staff	6	9	5	0	0	0
Technology	0	15	2	2	1	0
Study space	2	14	1	1	2	0
Access to materials	3	13	3	0	1	0
Atmosphere	2	12	3	1	2	0

Those areas revolve around current study space and updating to both the interior and amount of computers the students have available for use.

Students also weighed in on how accessible Mabee Library was on campus. The chart below will show the majority of students agreed with most of the statement but felt Mabee Library would benefit from parking being erected close by, which right now there is only faculty parking close to the building.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Can walk by foot if you are on campus	12	8	0	0	0
Parking close by	4	7	2	7	0
Center of campus	2	12	2	4	0
Close to classes	4	10	5	0	1
Not accessible	0	1	2	11	6

Upon interview five graduated students, it became apparent there are some items Mabee Library can improve to guarantee more users visiting the library. The majority of interviewees were happy with the services Mabee provided; however, there were some problems for concern. Technology was considered to be accessible in what was supplied, but one person thought the computer lab could be advertised better to ensure students were not standing around waiting for the five public computers in the front of the library (N. Lazarevski, personal communication, November 25, 2008). He felt most students did not know the computer lab was for public use

also. Another interviewee felt the electronic resources located on these computers were not explained to students and could be improved (T. Gallaway, personal communication, November 25, 2008). S. Kent (personal communication, November 26, 2008) thought the staff was at times unfriendly in answering questions and said she often felt she was interrupting what they were working on while at the reference desk.

All students, both interviewed and surveyed, submitted suggestions to improve Mabee Library. It was interesting to see the different responses and to think about how little changes can make a library environment a friendlier place to search for information. The Washburn University community spoke of better signage to highlight books and computer stations, a new, less confusing printing system, a warmer temperature, more drop boxes around campus, free shipping of materials to students, an eating policy, and offering tutoring to students as ways to facilitate student's needs. There were also mentions of bigger changes to Mabee Library that would require university funds. These include updating the interior to make it more modern, a parking lot closer to the building, the inclusion of more group study rooms located away from the main entrance, and training for staff in customer service related areas.

These improvements shared by students of Washburn University for Mabee Library could be put into action starting with the small, easily changed suggestions. Library staff could put a suggestion box at the circulation desk and see what other needs the Washburn community is interested achieving. Moving on to the bigger, more intensive projects might take some initiative of the staff to talk with the Board of Regents about building changes. This can be done, however, if Mabee Library realizes the needs of the students come before money issues.

In preparing this community analysis, it is evident that Washburn is still a community geared toward non-traditional students. However, there has been an increase of traditional

students, and with that come changes in the needs of the students. Mabee Library must incorporate these needs into the current environment of the library to ensure the usage of the student community and to thrive as a place of knowledge for the Topeka area.

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## Appendix A

Survey questions

Do you live in Washburn's campus housing?

Yes

No

Estimate how far you live from campus.

Less than 5 miles

10 miles

20 miles

More than 20 miles

Other (please specify)

What family members reside with you? Please choose all that apply.

Children

Significant other

Parents

No family members

Other (Please specify)

Are you a student attending college straight out of high-school (traditional) or a student attending college later in life (non-traditional)?

Traditional

Non-Traditional

What is your living situation?

Rent

Own

Live with Family

Other (Please specify)

Where are you from?

Topeka

Elsewhere in Kansas

Another State

Another Country (Please specify)

If you are from Topeka, how many years have you lived here?

What ethnic group do you feel describes you?

African-American

Asian

Caucasian

Hispanic

Other (Please specify)

How many languages are spoken fluently in your house?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- More

What is your annual income?

- Less than \$30,000
- \$30,001-\$70,000
- \$70,001-\$100,000
- \$100,001-\$150,000
- More than \$150,000

What is your current employment status?

- Unemployed
- Full-Time
- Part-Time
- Retired
- Other (Please specify)

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Why do you visit Mabee library? (Please check all that apply)

- Research for classes
- Use the online database
- Study areas
- Get reference help
- Check out materials
- Other (Please specify)

How often do you frequent Mabee Library?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Month
- Less than Once a Month
- Never

Please answer this question on how you are satisfied with Mabee library.

Very Satisfied Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Neutral Somewhat Dissatisfied

Courteous Staff

Technology

Study space



Access to materials  
Inviting atmosphere

What would you improve about Mabee Library?

What other libraries do you visit? (Please check all that apply)

Washburn Law Library  
Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library  
State Library  
Historical Society Library  
Other (Please specify)

What do you think about Mabee's iRead program?

Interesting, I hope to join  
I have already joined  
I do not need to participate  
Never heard of it

What do you think about Mabee Library being open 24 hours during finals?

I take advantage of this currently  
I do not need this accommodation  
They are?

Do you use Mabee's online catalog to search for information?

Yes  
No  
Sometimes

Have you been told about Mabee's new online catalog search engine called Encore?

Yes  
No  
No idea

How easily is Mabee accessible from campus?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree  
Can walk by foot if you are on campus  
Parking close by  
Center of campus  
Close to classes  
Not accessible

What other services would you use if they were provided?

What suggestions do you have for Mabee Library overall?

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

Since graduating from Washburn University, in what ways have you continued to use Mabee Library?

How do you contribute as part of Washburn's alumni?

Describe specific barriers to your information searches while a student.

Tell me what your thoughts were about Mabee Library as a student.

As a student, why did you use Mabee library?

As a student, how often did you frequent Mabee Library?

What other libraries did you visit while a student at Washburn?

If so, why did you visit other libraries?

How did you utilize the catalog at Mabee?

What did you think of Mabee's provision of current technology?

What aspects of Mabee's atmosphere did you enjoy the most?

Describe Mabee's services that were the most helpful to you.

What other services would you have used if they were provided?

Overall, how satisfied were you with Mabee's library?

What suggestions do you have for Mabee?