

Security Issues with Community Users in an Urban University Library

Scott E. Muir

Introduction

College and university libraries, unlike their public library counterparts that serve an entire community, have a mission of meeting the information and research needs of a specific target audience: the faculty, staff and students of a specific institution. However, many college libraries do provide some degree of public access to unaffiliated community users. This may include members of the community who are homeless which can result in situations and concerns that college and university libraries may not have experienced before and thus, do not have policies or procedures to govern these circumstances. The Downtown Phoenix campus Library of Arizona State University (ASU), like many urban campuses, has a significant population of community users, including people who are transients and homeless. The mild Winters and moderate Spring and Fall seasons make Phoenix a desirable location for many homeless people.

There are articles in the library literature that describe how (public) libraries can offer services and assistance to their homeless patrons, including courses in computer instruction. University and college libraries typically do not offer basic computer instruction because it is usually offered elsewhere on campus. One article offers detailed suggestions for dealing with the mentally ill in a public library setting.^{1 2 3 4} While the literature has many articles on transients and the mentally ill in the public library setting, there is less to be found that focuses exclusively on these same populations in an academic library setting. Several articles focus on providing services, such as, reference support and computer access to non-affiliated users (community users), but do not address the unique challenges of transients and the mentally ill.^{5 6 7} The combined public and state university library in San Jose, California, has a detailed plan in which they work with the local homeless community. This plan seems more typical for the public library aspects than the academic side.⁸ One article, although older, details the research into the problems and strategies that library used to cope with the mentally ill in their urban university library setting.⁹ Another article from a private university proposes treating homeless users in the same way as one would treat students. While this last suggestion has merit, it may not be a sustainable option for all colleges and universities.¹⁰

Located in the heart of downtown Phoenix, the nation's sixth largest city, Downtown Phoenix is the newest campus of ASU. The colleges on the campus include the College of Nursing and Health Innovation, The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and the

College of Public Programs with majors in Social Work, Non-Profit Leadership, Criminology, Tourism and Recreation Management, etc. The campus also houses the offices for University College – the home for ASU students who have yet to select a major. In addition, numerous institutes that are also a part of ASU, are located on the Downtown Phoenix campus. The Sandra Day O’Connor Law School is slated to move downtown when funds for construction become available. The Library which is a part of the Information Commons (IC), a combined library and computer commons, is located on the lower level of the University Center (UCENT) building. The UCENT building also contains offices including parking, cashiering, classrooms, faculty offices, registrar’s functions, and even a U.S. Congressmen’s local office. Since this campus lacks a true student union, the UCENT building supplements that function. The campus is located one block from a Valley Metro light rail stop, a few blocks away is a section 108 senior housing facility, and the library is less than one mile from the Burton Barr (main branch) of Phoenix Public Library. The downturn in the economy a few years after this campus opened, forced the reduction of hours at Phoenix Public Library thereby sending more community traffic to the ASU Downtown Phoenix campus Library.

Unlike a public library that is established to provide services to all members of the community, a university or college library has a target audience that consists mainly of students, faculty, and staff. Community users who come into the library generally do not receive this same level of service. In offering services to members of the general public, this library has had to make decisions about what services can be offered to them based on the contractually licensed databases and also what services the staff are able to provide without compromising services to the primary clientele, ASU students whose tuition dollars help support the University.¹¹ Members of the community may provide less direct support through local taxes or support for bond measures and can purchase a community card, allowing them to check out books. Any member of the public can come into the library and study, read the on-site books and journals, make use of a “public” computer, bring their laptop and use the wireless internet, and use most library-licensed databases while on-site. Other services are not available, including interlibrary loan, or remote access to licensed databases.

The community of library users is diverse: many community users are average citizens who come to the library for a specific purpose; some are jobless or financially disadvantaged, some are mentally ill or homeless, and some have criminal backgrounds. The homeless and transient population has a different set of needs and creates a different set of challenges than do permanent residents of the community who may come in, use a computer and then leave. The library developed a number of policies and processes for dealing with the variety of community users, some of whom spend much of their day in the library or in the UCENT building, intermixing with the students, faculty, and staff. The policies have been modified over time, with the key focus being a code of conduct, or expected user behaviors with a goal to minimize disruption in services to other patrons. This article will talk about the strategies and successes, the challenges, and the solutions that this library has experienced in finding the right balance and still maintain service to the primary user group – the students of ASU.

Downtown Phoenix campus

On March 14, 2006, Phoenix Proposition 3 passed by 66%, allocating \$223 million in bond money to fund ASU's Downtown Phoenix campus. ASU's President regularly states that this is the only known case in U.S. history of city residents voting to partially fund the building of a state university campus. This effort was a part of seven bond referendums totaling \$878.5 million that passed during that election. Proposition 3, touted as part of an effort to revitalize the downtown Phoenix area, was supported by the Phoenix city mayor, other elected officials, and local business owners. Other supported propositions on that day included funding for new police and fire stations, improved parks, expansion of the public libraries, and improvements to streets and sewers. Unfortunately, a few years later, the economic downturn set back many of these efforts. Due to this community support and approval of the bond money, there is a strong commitment from ASU for involvement and community engagement that includes providing the community users with access to library resources and services.

This new campus opened on August 21, 2006 and was intended to be fully integrated into its surroundings. The buildings on campus blend seamlessly with the businesses and shops in downtown Phoenix, and are ideally suited to represent the public mission of Arizona State University. They are a mixture of university, government, corporate, and private offices. Commercial eateries are situated in campus buildings and open onto the city streets, offering food services to students and the public. All of the initial campus buildings were extant and were rehabbed for the campus functions, with newer buildings built later. The proximity of the campus to Phoenix city government offices and those of the state government, the banking, finance, and tourism industries, charities and nonprofit organizations, newspaper, and healthcare facilities, allows it to place the Downtown Phoenix campus students in a metropolitan, working laboratory where they can learn, work and live. The openness of campus also creates an opportunity for members of the community, including the homeless, to just walk in through the doors of campus buildings.

The Downtown Phoenix campus library is one of seven comprising the ASU Libraries. There are also four libraries on the historic Tempe campus, one at the West campus in northwest Phoenix, and one on the Polytechnic campus in east Mesa. The Fletcher Library (West) and Polytechnic Library are geographically remote enough that they see very few transients. The Polytechnic Library may go days without a single community user. While the libraries in Tempe are in a busy part of that community, the Hayden (main) Library is located in the center of campus, about ½ mile from all major streets. Access to that library is less convenient for the general public than is the Downtown Phoenix campus library, which is located one block from a transit station. The Tempe campus has nearly 60,000 on-site students compared with the 8,000 students on-site downtown, so the transient population is less apparent in Tempe when mixed in with the larger student population.

Since the downtown campus was developed in a relatively few short months, a clear space had to be identified for the Information Commons (IC). The Provost for the Downtown Phoenix campus determined that the basement of the UCENT building could be used for library space. It was a mechanical room filled with dust and machinery. The space was cleaned, the

equipment moved, and with the services of a talented interior design firm, the space became a very attractive library. It is a long rectangular space, with the public area much longer than it is wide. The original plan was to have a single combined service desk for the library staff and the University Technology Office (UTO) staff. The offices of the Disability Resource Center originally were slated to be located in the IC and make use of the same service desk as their initial point of contact. They were located elsewhere in the building due to space constraints. Due to the space requirements, such as course reserves materials, supplies, printer paper and the like, the service desk, including circulation, was located near the north end of the IC where there was room for the storage of these materials. The public computers were located in that area and the student computers in the south end of the IC near the reference librarians' offices.

Soon after the August 2006 opening, it became apparent that the placement of the service desk design (See Figure 1) left an entrance with no one there to greet and direct users appropriately or to assist with problems.

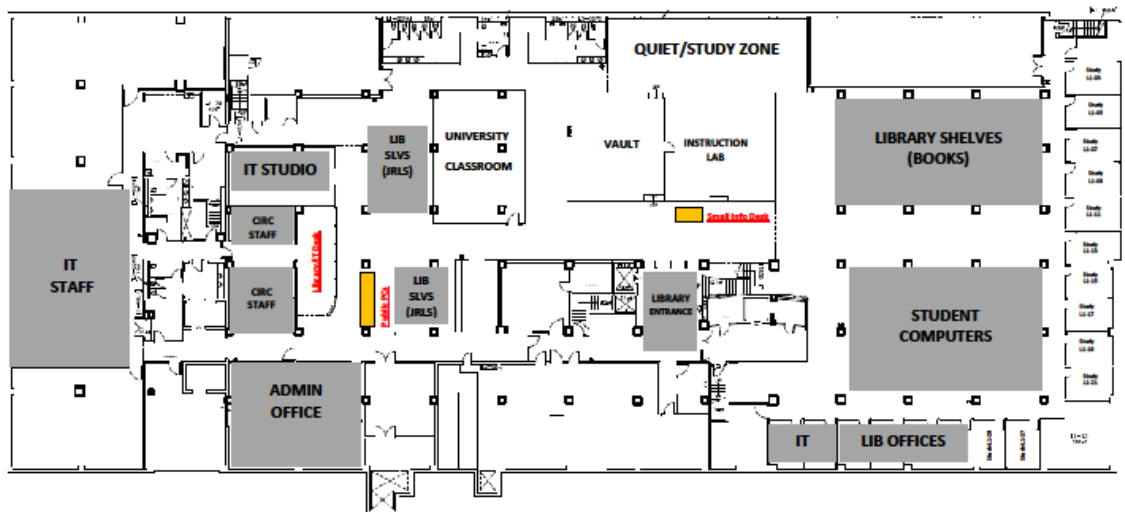


Figure 1 – UCENT Lower Level

The IC staff then established a second service desk near the entrance. As the strategies for the delivery of services have evolved, a proposal to create a combined single service point near the main entrance has been developed and ideally will be put into place over the summer of 2011 (see Figure 2).

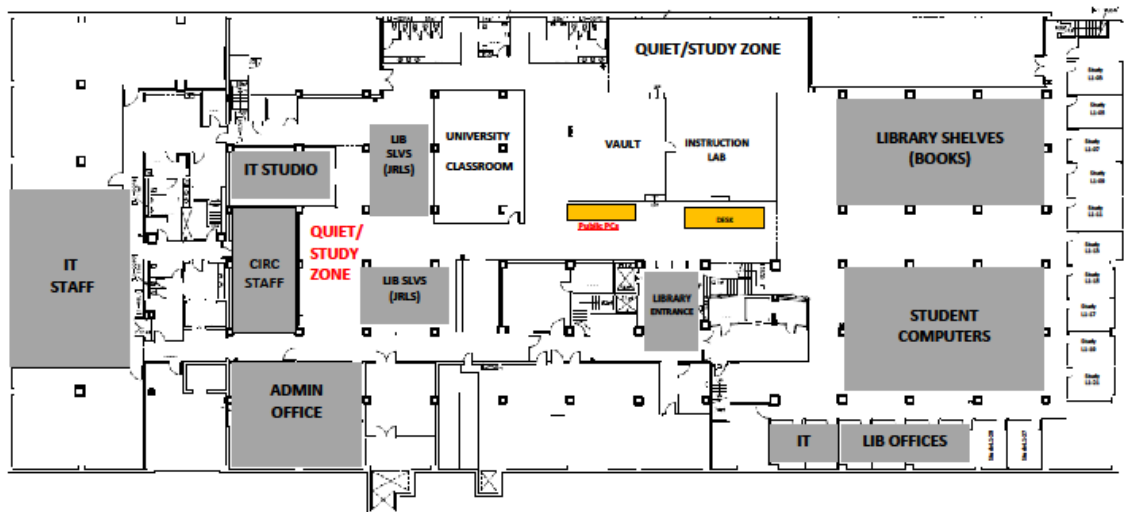


Figure 2 – UCENT Lower Level

This desk will include both the UTO and library staff and should improve services and patron contact, and reduce the number of student employees required to staff the desk, resulting in budget savings.

Campus Safety

Prior to the campus opening, the ASU President made it clear that while the public should have access to the Information Commons, the IC should not be treated as a public space. He had previously worked at Columbia University, in New York City. Columbia, being a private institution, had different rules than ASU, a public university with a long-term lease on a building owned by the city of Phoenix. Nevertheless, the IC staff did set about to address his concerns.

The newly-hired library director worked with the head of ASU’s Department of Public Safety (DPS) to ensure that the space would be welcoming, but at the same time a safe and secure space for students and for the staff who work there.¹² Effective communication and a concerted effort to build an ongoing working relationship were the key to active support and shared operations between the library and DPS. A number of strategies were considered; among them, having a security guard check each person entering the IC and requiring that they show an ID for entry into the space. The total costs of such a checkpoint were estimated to be nearly \$100,000 annually, and were determined to be cost-prohibitive.

The IC staff also began to develop a “code of conduct” that included guidelines for behaviors like being too loud, swearing, misuse of computer equipment, vandalism, and the like. The Downtown Phoenix campus library merged thoughts developed here with existing code of conduct policies already in place in the other ASU Libraries.¹³ This library also identified components of the code to be used as posted signs through the IC. Input from the ASU Office

of General Counsel ensured legal compliance with civil rights. As part of this effort, a no-sleeping policy was established in the IC. While some libraries allow students to nap, for the Downtown Phoenix campus library, it is both difficult and biased to enforce a differentiated policy when one cannot always distinguish between a student and a community user. Without such a policy, this library could easily be overrun, on 100-plus degree days, with people who just want to come into an air-conditioned space and sleep. While the enforcement of this policy is not strict, staff do wake people. They never make physical contact for reasons of personal safety. Staff diplomatically ask the person if they are okay. The campus students got involved and came up with a slogan titled, “You Snooze, You Lose” pointing out that while one is sleeping, a purse, backpack, laptop or cell phone can easily be stolen. Allowing food and drink in the IC has also been a question. While many libraries now allow food and drink, the IC is co-managed with the UTO which does not allow food and drink in their computing commons on other campuses. The official policy on this campus maintains that food and drink is not allowed in the IC, but it is not enforced to any great degree, with the exception of disruptive or highly messy food, like pizza. Staff also prohibit community users from holding picnics in the IC. As things have progressed and new situations occur, policies are updated; for example, establishing a policy that people may not shave or bathe in the restrooms.

The code of conduct policy can be found on the libraries web site,¹⁴ and it is clearly posted in a number of places in the IC. This posting not only discloses the policy to users, but it enables an officer or staff member to indicate the sign when someone asks, “Where does it say that I cannot do that?” The posting also provides a stronger legal standing. The code of contact has been edited and refined to address issues that continue to arise. A more recent set of changes is based on a policy from the Phoenix Public Library, which deals with many of these same behavioral issues. The policy was initially intended to apply only to the IC but has been adapted to apply to all buildings on the Downtown Phoenix campus.

The Downtown Phoenix campus is fortunate to have a highly skilled Department of Public Safety commander. He has a friendly outgoing manner. He is also a highly-skilled and nationally-recognized expert in the field of public safety. He has been very thoughtful in his approach, and not extreme. The Downtown Phoenix campus DPS staff includes other officers, unarmed uniformed police aids, and at times, contract staff from a security agency. Due to the partnership with City of Phoenix, the responsibilities for crime enforcement are split between the ASU Department of Public Safety and City of Phoenix Police Department. Police aides and DPS officers regularly patrol the library as a visibility and community-policing strategy. IC staff know the officers by name which enhances the spirit of cooperation and trust. While some officers might be happier if the library did not offer public access, the majority have a positive manner. Staff, in turn, ask DPS officers how the library can best work with them to make their jobs easier. Due to the mutual respect, there is an incredibly effective process.

ASU's goal has been to make the campus and the library a very safe and inviting environment, and there have been very few violent or criminal incidents, according to campus police reports.¹⁵ In addition to uniformed officers, Phoenix is fortunate to have a group of men and women called Ambassadors.¹⁶ Easily recognized by the orange shirts they wear, they can be seen throughout the core downtown Phoenix area. They walk or ride bicycles and can escort a

person to their destination within their patrol area, provide shopping and restaurant suggestions, and offer information about events. They are very familiar with downtown and as such, they know many of the homeless who reside downtown by sight. The Ambassadors provide an extra set of ears and eyes on the streets and are regularly seen throughout the campus. The Downtown Phoenix campus has proven to be a very safe campus.

According to local law enforcement, the vast majority of the homeless population in downtown Phoenix are not dangerous. Phoenix city police indicate that only a small handful are violent and those individuals are, for the most part, known to law enforcement officials. However, some staff and students may comment or complain that an individual smells bad, makes them uncomfortable, or makes them afraid, etc. There is some irony in that many of the graduates from programs on this campus such as social work, criminology, and nursing, will likely deal with this disadvantaged population as clients.

Additional cameras were added in the IC as a security measure. While the cameras are recording at all times, they are not continuously monitored; however, one can go back and review an incident. Most staff-only areas are locked at all times and staff remind students and other users to be vigilant with their possessions. Staff are encouraged to question someone in a staff-only area if they do not recognize the person. A simple comment like, "Hello, I don't think I have met you. May I help you?" can be a non-threatening deterrent. Criminals do not want to be recognized, and the staff member is pointing out to the person that they have indeed been noticed.

Over time, there were training sessions on resources for the homeless for IC staff, indicating where they can be directed to shelters, where they can get water bottles, sleep, get fed, bathe, wash their clothes, receive medical care, etc. IC staff have been taught how to handle uncomfortable situations and that they can ask a library user to leave, if their body odor is particularly offensive and may direct them to a shelter, indicating that the person may return after bathing and washing their clothes. Phoenix is known for its hot weather and in the summer temperatures can be brutal with many successive days above 110, with nights in the 90s. Some of the transient population is simply looking for an air-conditioned space in which they can cool down. The homeless are particularly vulnerable to the heat and there have been incidents of people who were overcome by heat and passed-out in the library. At the same time, the ASU campus is not a cooling or hydration station and staff can instead direct a transient to places where they can get water or cool off. A recent training session helped staff develop strategies for dealing with patrons that refuse to cooperate, e.g. will not leave at closing time, or if someone tries to use staff-only equipment. These sessions serve as an ongoing strategy for staff development and safety.

Since opening day, the Downtown Phoenix campus Library has used an "Incident Report." This report is based on a similar document in use on the Tempe campus. The report allows the staff member to document the "who, what, when, where, etc" of any incidents for which DPS is called. It provides a consistent means for documentation and it is saved so there is a written audit trail of incidents. People who do not follow the code of conduct are subject to expulsion for a day and for more extreme behavior, they may be "trespassed". A person who is

trespassed must leave immediately and is informed by DPS that they will be arrested if they return. All of these actions are documented on the incident report and shared with the staff in the IC. While there has not been a serious incident with ASU students and the IC code of conduct, if such a situation were to occur, the student's behavioral issues would be handled through an established internal process in the Office of Student Affairs.

Some of the incidents involving community users might border on the humorous side. "Walter" a big, burly, wild-haired, bushy-bearded man regularly came in and quietly used the public computers. One day, Walter requested to borrow a pair of scissors. He returned some thirty minutes later, scissors in hand, clean-shaven and sporting a new haircut. Staff were surprised to get reports of a female user in the Women's restroom with her entire face lathered up with shaving cream. There have been a few incidents of sex in the family bathroom, people who were intoxicated or high, and a small handful of incidents of threatening behaviors. Recently, there was a fight between two public patrons which was the first such incident since the IC's opening, over four years ago. The campus police arrived within minutes of being called and dealt with the patrons. A few arrests have been made for people with outstanding warrants, and one man was arrested when an officer observed him viewing child pornography. Since public machines are filtered, it is likely that he brought the material with him on a flash drive.

The vast majority of the issues revolve around behavior that is mostly inappropriate or disruptive – talking too loud, swearing, failure to follow staff directives, and other disruptive behaviors. Fortunately, a staff member has never been assaulted. The library staff clearly understand that they are never to put themselves at risk, especially over property. At the same time, some staff members have felt uncomfortable enough that they requested an escort to the bus or to their car, expressing fear of being identified outside the IC when leaving.

Some problems seem to go in cycles. As an example of one specific problem that has completely dissipated, a DPS officer who was a former city police officer, was monitoring what appeared to be gang-like behavior. There were two disparate groups that hung around and used or waited to use the public computers. He observed that there was some tension between these two groups. As staff trespassed a few of those people due to various disruptive behaviors, this issue stopped. It seems that the news of such incidents and the repercussions travels, particularly when staff trespass people. Typically if staff expel a small number of people over a short time, the patron behavior in the IC space greatly improves for several months.

The most recent code of conduct policy indicates that "The ASU Downtown Phoenix campus buildings and facilities, including the common areas, are for the use of ASU students, faculty and staff, individuals or groups associated or affiliated with or invited by the University, and building tenants and their invitees." The University Librarian was asked to approve this policy and her response was that the ASU Libraries could support it, as long as individuals who entered the IC to use the services of the library or to conduct research would not be prohibited from doing so, provided they followed the standards of conduct.

Public Computers

It took awhile for the IC to be fully discovered by the community. About a year after opening, there began to be waiting lines for the ten computers set aside for the public as well as the increased demand for student computers. A number of changes occurred over the next few years. Due to increased need by students, six computers were relocated to the students' area, reducing the number for the public down to four. The Downtown Phoenix campus library acquired a license for a public PC reservation system which was already in use on the Tempe campus. The system allows staff or the user to set an appointment time to use a computer, typically based on first-come basis. The reservations in this library are limited to one hour per day. Although library policies stress that the computers are intended for research only, email, job searches and application submissions are also a service valued by the users. There are also users who want to use the computers for games or watching videos, etc. While staff do not monitor usage closely enough to stop people from using the equipment for those other purposes, the library changed the headphone checkout policy to make them available only to students, and the sound cards in the public computers were deactivated to deter the entertainment value of the equipment. One benefit of the current location of the public PCs is that campus DPS can easily walk in behind the community users and monitor for potential illegal activity.

The switch to the reservation system necessitated a user registration in the local Integrated Library System (ILS), since the reservation system validates against the ILS database. The PC reservation community user gets an ID number that only allows for the use of the public computers, and not any other service. As time has progressed, the process was modified and all new accounts require that the user present a state-issued photo ID. They also must sign a form acknowledging they have read and understand the code of conduct and that they agree to comply with it, before they will be given an access ID number. The library also activated the feature of the reservation system that allows people to make their own reservations, thereby saving some staff time. New users and people wanting to renew their accounts, which expire every three months, must still interact with the desk staff. Student computers require the use of a campus-wide authentication locally known as an ASURite ID. Many universities follow a similar model.¹⁷ The level of security blocks the PC reservation members from using a student computer, unless they wander around and discover a PC where the student did not log-off.

In many ways the community users, and in particular, the homeless population, have made the current public computing area "theirs" and they are frequently more demanding in terms of service than are the ASU students. This demanding behavior mirrors the experience outlined in the article about North Carolina State University which discusses the behaviors of mentally ill users in that library.¹⁸

Under the proposed new plan, the space where the main service desk is currently located will become a quiet study area and will relocate the public user space closer to the new service desk; a higher traffic location that makes them much more visible. The Downtown Phoenix campus DPS Commander suggests that the high visibility location will discourage engagement in inappropriate behavior which may discourage people who do not have legitimate library

business from coming at all. The proposal also recommends the use of standing height desks without stools so that people will do their work more quickly and leave. There will be one adjustable-height desk for those community users in wheelchairs or with disabilities. The goal is to provide service to the community users without creating an overly comfortable environment.

There is an awareness within the libraries that, while community users do not have to be given unlimited access to do anything they wish on a computer, there is a responsibility to be open to those who need to use resources for research needs. For some of these users, the computers provide the only access to the internet for keeping in touch with family members, applying for a job, or finding topical information. This service provides good public relations for the library and is a source of community outreach. While an ASU attorney has indicated this library does not legally have to make access available to non-affiliates of ASU, even though the ASU Libraries are a federal depository,¹⁹ the University Librarian feels very strongly that the ASU Libraries should continue to do so.

That said, the libraries are by no means obligated to provide a place for community users to socialize or sit around all day (or all night) without legitimate library needs, nor must the libraries provide a place that resembles a campsite with backpacks and bedrolls left lying around. There is an expectation that patrons, students and non-students alike, will be reading or doing research while in the libraries. To deter "camping out," this library may eventually explore a no-loitering policy on the Downtown Phoenix campus that a patron may arrive no more than 5 or 10 minutes before the computer appointment and one must leave the IC when the appointment or other library business is completed. The DPS Commander has assured the IC staff that his officers will take the lead in the enforcement of this change. Another option, for purposes of maintaining a safe environment for student study, includes restricting late night access to the IC to those with a valid ASU ID card. In Fall 2011, a new policy restricting access to the Downtown Phoenix campus buildings to affiliates of ASU only after 9:00 p.m., will be put into place. Any person, including members of the general public who are not there on official business with ASU will be asked to leave.

One additional problem that has arisen is the issue of soiled furniture, some of which has been badly stained with questionable substances, possibly body fluids. To date, there have not been bedbugs or lice, but as a precaution, the furniture is deloused as part of the regular cleaning process. The library recently switched out the fabric upholstered chairs used by the community users for chairs made with plastic. The new chairs are still comfortable, but they are easily cleaned with a strong cleansing product, providing for a clean environment for all patrons in that area. However, community patrons are not restricted to this area and can still sit in other parts of the library.

Conclusions

Problems in the UCENT building do not apply to the library alone. On the first floor of the UCENT building, there are eight standing height computers intended for short-term, quick use. There were a number of abuses, from business people treating them like they were their office computers and trying to run a company from there, to what appeared to be young gang

members staking out territory. In response, these computers are now only available to students and authorized affiliates with an ASURite authentication.

Most of the problem behaviors experienced on other floors were mainly annoyances, asking if the cashier's office would loan them money, shouting "I love you" to staff working at their desks, or a man who regularly brought in various devices of his own making with flashing electronic lights. Employees on the first floor of the building have complained about transients in the building being disruptive or making people uncomfortable. Some staff have questioned the impression the transients can make on potential new students when the students visit the campus with their families. The latest round of complaints followed a revision to the aforementioned code of conduct policy indicating that while the space is open to anyone, it is for the purpose of those conducting business with ASU or one of the other building tenants. People who are loitering or just hanging around may be asked to leave.

Strategies for dealing with nonaffiliated community users and the homeless population will to continue to be a topic of discussion for this campus. A number of conversations and meetings have been held with the Vice President for the Downtown Phoenix campus and her staff, people who work in offices on the first floor of the UCENT building, DPS, and others. The library continues to be involved.

In some ways, the issues with the community users have been more problematic in other parts of the building than in the Information Commons. This is due to a number of salient points. First is the willingness of the library staff to engage the community users; the library staff know community users who come to the library frequently and converse with them regularly. This can serve to humanize an awkward or difficult situation. Other units in the building have less opportunity to deal as directly with the community. Second, staff in the IC have a clear understanding of when and how to enforce the code of conduct and when to contact the Department to Public Safety for their assistance. Public Safety clearly understands when library staff call and request help, that the staff have already taken initial steps to deal with the issue, or that they perceive that threatening behavior is imminent. Finally, library staff are willing to be firm and state to a user that they have violated policies too often or to such an extent they are being told to leave, either for the day or permanently. Employees in other parts of the building are less willing to become directly involved. Providing services to the community and to the homeless population provides challenges and Downtown Phoenix campus library will continue to be open to their needs and also to ensure and maintain a focus on the safety and needs of the ASU students, faculty and staff.

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Scott P. Muir (Scott.Muir@asu.edu) is Director of the Downtown Phoenix campus Library at Arizona State University University.

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