

Bard Library Podcast

00:00 Josh: Welcome back everybody, to our next edition of our podcast series. Today we'll be talking about the library here at Bard. I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission, and as always, I'm here with Mackie Siebens.

00:15 Mackie: Hello Josh! As Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, I'm the Director of Admission and an alumna of the college as well, and today, we're going to be talking about the library and library and library resources with Betsy Cawley who's joining us today! Hi Betsy!

00:27 Betsy: Hi Mackie, hi Josh! How are you?

00:29 Mackie: Good, good!

00:29 Josh: I'm doing well, how are you? Thanks for being here!

00:32 Betsy: Great, very happy to be here!

00:35 Mackie: So, we'll start with the first question. What can you tell us about your role as the director of libraries here at the college?

00:40 Betsy: My role as director of libraries is really to be a sort of organizer and conduit. You know, we're constantly looking at what the needs for students are, what the needs for our faculty are, and trying to meet those needs at every single level. And some of my work involves working with the other librarians on staff, some of my work involves taking the work that we're doing in the library and making sure that that's known, and responsive to what's going on in the campus in general. That's I think my primary role, is sort of being the person that connects all these things together.

01:27 Mackie: Great!

01:27 Betsy: And I work with students too, and I have to say, for 25 years, that has been the biggest pleasure of my job.

01:36 Mackie: Nice, well I think, I'm glad that you're in that position and really enjoy working with students! I imagine –

01:42 Betsy: I worked with you!

01:43 Mackie: I remember! I remember well, during my senior project. That's right, I remember it well. And what types of services does the library have?

01:53 Betsy: Well, we've got books, certainly, and we have e-books. We actually, we're up above, between physical books and e-books, we're up above 900,000 titles at this point which is pretty significant, yeah, it's a pretty significant collection. I'd say we have about 85 or 90 research databases, and they range from you know, newspaper databases to utilities that you can use to create a bibliography. We have a very robust archives program, really wonderful local history resources. We work very closely with Montgomery Place, we have the visual resources center as part of the library, so whenever you need images, we have an enormous collection of images. What else? So much. We offer instruction in information literacy, and research skills, we offer that as kind of just a general thing for everybody, and we offer that also within the context of particular classes. We have research guides for classes for – you need to stop me before I go, before I take up all the time - so we have research guides for particular classes and particular subject areas, and particular to very specific things as well, so we work with other members of the staff and other departments to create research guides. What else? You know, I can't I think say this often enough, that the biggest service that we offer is a kind of one on one working with students on all their research needs, across every part of their experience at Bard. Whether they have questions during L&T, or whether they're trying to figure out how to upload their senior projects into our database, you know, at the end of their senior year.

03:45 Josh: Betsy could you elaborate maybe a bit on how you and your colleagues help do that work? And what other types of ways you work with students?

03:52 Betsy: Sure, very often students will come to us and say "well I have to write this paper, and I don't know where to start. And so we make an appointment with them usually, although you can do that on the fly as well, you can just come to the reference desk, but we'll make an appointment, we'll sit down, we'll go through all the search strategies that they'll need to help them find certain materials and then we'll sort of set them off, because really a big part of our mandate is teaching people how to do this on their own. Because you won't always have the resources of the library, you won't always have the resources of a librarian who will sit down and work with you like this, but you'll always need to be able to find research, and you'll always need to be able to evaluate research. One of the things that I think we're thinking more and more about is how to create people who go out into the world and support public libraries, know how to get this research, understand what real information is, what true information is, how to figure out what's a fact and what's propaganda, all those things are very important and those are things we do in the library.

05:07 Mackie: Great, thank you! And moving from those resources into the physical space of the library, can you talk a little bit about how students can actually use the space itself?

05:22 Betsy: The library is open every day. Most days until 1am. We open at 8 in the morning, we close at 1am except for Friday and Saturday nights when we close at 10, because Bard students, I guess they like to –

05:35 Mackie: Lots of things to do, yeah.

05:39 Betsy: So, we have a lot of hours. We have, I mean, this is a little bit difficult to describe, just you know in words, but the library is made up of these sort of three sections. So, the first part is a classical Greek building that was built in 1892. And it's the part of the library that typically tends to be the quietest. It's where we house back issues of periodicals and also some of our special collections, we have Hannah Arendt's personal library, with the books she had in her apartment in New York and I believe in a house upstate here, and those books contain her marginalia, so that's a collection that people from all over the world come to use. We have some rare books in there. But that tends to be a sort of very quiet area. And then we have large tables there, but upstairs on the fourth floor of that building, we have, it's sky lit, it's a really beautiful section of the library. We have senior carrels and we also have some standing desks, we have sort of lounge type areas, for when you just need to sit and bang away at your laptop, we have a large work table up there. And then in the slightly newer section of the building which was built in the 1960s, that's where we have a computer lab for students to use, we have the Sussman Room, which contains the collection of Alan Sussman and those are rare books in philosophy and law. And that's actually a really beautiful part of the library, again sky lit, it has furniture in it that, a bookcase from Skyler House, this large ornate bookcase from Skyler House is in there, and then all the other bookcases that house the Sussman collection were built in imitation of that, so it's sort of –

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07:39 Mackie: Oh cool.

07:40 Betsy: Yeah, it's really, really pretty. There are always students in the Sussman Room, because it's just a really lovely place to work. We have, and then we have more senior carrels and work tables on the second floor. We have large windows on the Western part of the library, and so get a lot of natural light in the library, students really love to work there. And then the newest part of the building was design in the 1990s, I believe it opened in 1992, so a hundred years after the first part of the library, and that was designed by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, who are Pritzker award winning, well, let me rephrase that, he won the Pritzker prize, but she's a woman. So, Pritzker prize award winning architects. They are the parents of post-modern architecture. It is a really, really lovely part of the library. That's the western part, where the windows are. It's got a variety of different spaces. I actually think that depending on your study style – a lot of students like to study alone – a lot of students like to study in a group – a lot of students like to just be in a place where other people are doing the same thing they're doing, sort of like to be on the edge of all of that. I think we have a space for everybody in that library. We have four study rooms, I'm hoping to open a fifth, maybe even a sixth soon.

09:12 Mackie: Oh nice. Those are the sort of larger, right by the stairwell corner, with those windows?

09:15 Betsy: Yeah.

09:17 Mackie: I used to work there a lot, with friends, we used to sort of band together and do power hours of work.

09:22 Betsy: Yeah, yeah, no it's still used for that. There are big whiteboards in there that students use, and we also have a relatively sound proof room, that students can use for Skyping, or video conferencing. And we have an archives reading room as well.

09:41 Mackie: Nice

09:43 Josh: Great, that's excellent! So, is it possible for students to work at the library, or collaborate in any way?

09:50 Betsy: Actually yeah, on a number of different levels. We hire people to do shelving, we hire people to sit at service desks, we hire students to work in individual departments, so we have students that work with our education and instruction librarians, we have students who work in technical services, we have students who work in the archives, they do really wonderful work. We do, and we have shelvees too, but we also collaborate with students on a number of different projects. We have exhibit space in the library, and so very often students or classes of students will come in and we'll work with them on creating exhibits in the library of their work, and of other people's work. And the library, I will say that we have a lot of things on the walls and on the windows in the library, and those are all created by students. Typically, in one of our art classes, our studio art classes. And that's always a pleasure for us.

10:53 Mackie: Yeah, we do the same thing down in the Admission living room –

10:56 Betsy: Oh yeah?

10:57 Mackie: It's all artwork from students.

10:59 Betsy: That's great.

10:59 Mackie: Yeah. It's nice. And we're going to hopefully talk about any developments that you think might be happening in the future, I've also learned snippets from students and staff about some really creative things that you're doing in the library, lending things like lawn chairs, and really fun stuff, can you talk a little bit about that too?

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11:19 Betsy: Yeah, we've sort of been building up to this, but we have a library of things, as well. We have five lawn chairs that we can lend. Oh actually, you know there's another space, and that's outside the library. We have outside seating for students to use. But yeah, we have a library of things. We have the lawn chairs, we have prayer rugs for students to use, so that they can take a minute and pray or meditate. We have lamps for just when you need a little bit more light, and lately we've been focusing a lot – I mean you know, our students' work here is pretty intense, and our students are, they're really committed and they're really hard working, and it's important to be able to step away from your work, even just for a few minutes, so upstairs on the fourth floor we have a little timed walk through the stacks, it's a two minute walk with little prompts to breathe and things like that, but we also lend these take a break kits, and these take a break kits, my favorite take a break kit, is kaleidoscope, so it's an old styled one with little glass pieces in it. And we have little just sort of tactile puzzles that you can weave, Rubik's cubes, that sort of thing. We've got a sudoku book, and we have a book of crosswords. Around, in sort of high stress times, we put up a big coloring sheet, which we've been doing that for like two or three years now, and every year it gets filled a little bit more. Some people color and some people actually draw things in it. It's this big sort of New York City kind of thing, it's really fun.

13:04 Mackie: Cool! Very cool.

13:06 Josh: That's excellent. We've also heard about some special programs that the library puts on, could you talk a little bit about those?

13:12 Betsy: Sure! We're doing a lot more programming in the library now. We had a poetry reading on Monday night, that included a – it was a collaboration between a poet and a painter. And so we had a monitor which showed the paintings that are related to those poems, and then we made cookies that had the paintings on them as well.

13:34 Mackie: Oh, fun!

13:34 Betsy: So, yeah, we've had readings, we've had, what other programming have we done? We've had some, in collaboration with the houses –

13:45 Mackie: Yeah!

13:46 Betsy: with the house program, we've done a few things with the houses –

13:51 Mackie: There's a trivia coming up right, at the library?

13:51 Betsy: Yes, that's right!

13:52 Mackie: I'll be there!

13:53 Betsy: I'm writing the questions!

13:57 Mackie: Oh, my goodness.

13:57 Betsy: I know, I know. Now that I know that you're going to be there, I'll make them more about fashion.

14:03 Mackie: Oh boy! We'll see, we'll see. That'll be fun.

14:07 Betsy: Yeah, I think it'll be great. So, we do that. We've done haunted tours of the library. The old part of the library, there are many stories about. And last year we did – the Halloween party was Harry Potter themed, so we did a little, LED wands in the library.

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14:30 Mackie: Oh fun!

14:31 Betsy: Yeah, it was really fun.

14:33 Mackie: Great, any other developments, future plans that you want to add?

14:41 Betsy: Well, at the risk of sounding geeky, as I am raised as a librarian, we are working on a strategic plan. We sent out a survey a couple weeks ago to students and faculty, we've received an enormous number of responses. And so, we're very much looking forward to parsing all that out and figuring out what our next steps are, being more responsive, we're probably going to do some focus groups around that in the spring, so that will be fun. And then, this summer, we're going to be hosting Ex Machina The Library at Night, which is – it's based on Alberto Manguel's The Library at Night, which is kind of a history of libraries within the context of his own personal library and his relationship with those books. And it is a virtual reality tour of I believe it's 10 libraries, both fictional libraries and real libraries, it's very cool. So that's going to start in August, but it will continue – so you know, so first years can do it – and it will continue through to about the middle of September. So the returning students can do that as well, can see that. So, we're super excited about that, I'm not sure that the Library at Night has been in New York before, so yeah.

16:03 Mackie: That's very exciting.

16:03 Betsy: Yeah, and in the spring, we're have a student production of the Medea under the colonnade around the old part of the library, so we're looking forward to that as well.

16:13 Mackie: Great!

16:13 Betsy: Yeah!

16:14 Mackie: Well thank you so much Betsy for being with us today –

16:18 Betsy: Thank you!

16:18 Mackie: for sharing all of that.

16:20 Betsy: It was a pleasure.

16:21 Mackie: For those of you listening, if you have any questions that you want to send us, feel free to reach out at admission@bard.edu and if we can't answer the questions, we'll certainly ask Betsy to help.

16:31 Betsy: And the library's Instagram is [@bardlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/bardlibrary) and our website is www.bard.edu/library

16:42 Mackie: Great, and we'll be with you next time! Thanks!

16:45 Josh: Thanks everybody!