



## ARTICLE

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# Examining Our Roots: The Origins and Evolution of Outreach in Academic Libraries, 1958–2020

## ABSTRACT

Analysis of historical milestones in the field of library studies reveals the changing values, purposes, and structures related to outreach within academic libraries. A timeline and narrative are presented that trace the effects of the national outlook on higher education from the mid-century to the current neoliberal reality on outreach efforts, from 1958 to 2020. We contend that the present post-pandemic moment affords practitioners a chance to turn a critical eye toward the purpose and audience of outreach, to re-orient our actions, and to reflect an original philosophy of outreach: inclusivity.

## KEYWORDS

academic libraries, outreach, neoliberalism, higher education, history of outreach

In the wake of the "return to campus" after full or partial closures of our buildings and in-person library services resulting from COVID-19, we authors have felt a tugging to ask why when it comes to academic library outreach. We have become reflective and turned a critical eye toward our otherwise normal and inoffensive outreach offerings: Why game night? Why a seed library? Why sidewalk chalk? Why cookies? This study does not ask, "does serving cookies engage students?" It does not ask, "does the relationships made at outreach events with librarians result in reference appointments?" Instead, this study asks a more fundamental question: Why does academic librarianship do outreach as part of the profession? Academic librarians didn't do outreach in the usual way for nearly two years, and in making careful decisions about our limited time, staffing, and resources, we took the chance to re-orient ourselves on the philosophy and practice of outreach in academic libraries to answer the question of why we do outreach.

To satisfy our inquiries, we undertook a tracing of the origins and evolution of outreach through the historical milestones in the field's journals and professional associations, beginning with the earliest mention we could find in the literature, 1958. We created a timeline of 13 milestones and a narrative that presents the purpose, growth and changes over time, and current state of outreach in academic libraries—an undertaking we have yet to see in the outreach literature. For instance, the milestone of the Higher Education Act of 1965 resulted in the creation of a National Advisory Committee on Libraries, which provided new levels of funding to academic libraries (de la Peña McCoo 2002). Soon after, a boost in outreach activity could be seen, as our timeline and narrative will explain.

Learning from such examples overturned initial assumptions we as authors held about the purpose and results of outreach in academic libraries. When we began this project, our hypotheses were that library outreach corresponded with more modern undertakings to increase gate traffic and demonstrate a return on investment from the late 20th century. This ultimately proved wrong.

Instead, the present analysis reveals that the inclusive philosophy that historically fueled library outreach dwindled over time. When outreach efforts began in academic libraries in a spirit of inclusivity, the desire to share outreach practices grew through the creation of disciplinary entities such as conferences and committees over time. In the early years of the 21st century, outreach evolved quite obviously in its purpose and manner, becoming removed from inclusivity and leaning towards internal marketing of its own services to university audiences.

This paper argues that the effects of neoliberalism taking hold in higher education, including major shifts in perceptions and expectations of universities by outside stakeholders, as well as internal changes in attitudes and behaviors, have influenced academic libraries' reasons for and approaches to outreach. The evidence to support this claim is presented in a timeline and narrative starting in 1958, moving through the late 20th and early 21st century, and pausing at the present return-to-campus moment. The milestones presented on our timeline reflect important changes or decisions in the field that punctuate academic outreach trends—for instance, assessment is not a word one would come across frequently in the literature before 2000, around the time assessment became a watchword in higher education in general. After reviewing the scholarly literature that defines outreach, delineating methods and activity types, considering timely topics such as mental health, assessment, research gaps, and the management and administration of outreach, we present a timeline a narrative explanation of outreach's evolution in academic libraries. Heading toward the 2020s and beyond, we conclude our observations of this historical pattern with new scholarship that has begun to reclaim early outreach philosophies of inclusivity in spirit and in practice.

### **Muddy Waters: A Review of the Literature**

Conducting a review of the literature on outreach demonstrates the unfocused nature of the topic and scholarship of outreach in academic libraries over time. Diaz's 2019 meta-analysis of 29 definitions of outreach results in a unifying definition that is so wide-ranging as to be difficult to utilize. Still, definitions of outreach typically convey its purpose or rationale rather than define the topics, forms, and approaches of specific outreach projects, programs, or events.

For example, in their introduction to the 2003 special issue on outreach in academic libraries, Kelsey and Kelsey write: "Outreach services designed to promote awareness of the library and to meet the information needs of these constituents are of vital importance to academic and special libraries" (1). The question of which constituents are best served by outreach efforts is addressed by Schneider (2003). Schneider focuses her definition on unaffiliated non-academic users with outward-facing outreach rather than considering, as some studies of academic libraries have, the inclusion of promotion or marketing or the execution of events and programs to the library's own internal university audience regarding its services such as information literacy and research support. Schneider (2003) identifies three main reasons that academic libraries undertake outreach to their extra-academic user community: "whether a need is expressed from outside the academy, whether they see their mission as an

invitation to pursue an action on their own accord, or whether they construct a form of outreach in response to a specific problem or crisis” (201).

Further, Carter and Seaman (2011), in their attempt to understand the scope and nature of outreach, offer this definition of the purpose of outreach: “to reach out to their users, to encourage use of the library and its resources, and to promote a positive image on campus and often in the community—but the activities that libraries use to fulfill these purposes run the gamut” (164). Carter and Seaman’s (2011) work addresses the sticking point we note above in easily defining outreach because such efforts often overlap with the work of instruction, liaising, scholarly communication, etc. They write: “For some libraries, liaison work falls under the banner of outreach, while for other libraries, liaison activities such as collection development and library instruction represent distinctive functions established in libraries. These functions may share similar goals with outreach but do not carry the outreach label” (164).

Diaz (2019) analyzed 29 definitions of outreach as presented in the library science literature and provided a concept analysis to posit an overarching definition that reflects the heretofore disconnected themes and trends in the scholarship. As noted above, the challenge of encapsulating the variety of outreach efforts is evident in the many articles that describe libraries’ unique outreach topics and events. Examples and case studies are common in the literature including Shirato’s 1999 broad overview of the history of LOEX, which notes the types of topics that have risen to the surface of the organization over the years. Her examples from 1999 emphasize electronic resources and the impact of the burgeoning internet changing the focus of outreach to include marketing and instruction of these new tools.

Several years later, Fabian et al. (2004) discuss trends and types of outreach including exhibits, book talks, multimedia kiosks, and workshops for teaching assistants focused specifically on their needs. Notice that among these efforts, both students and faculty are the target audience, as they are in Bastone’s 2020 article on her library’s outreach methods, which included a Halloween scavenger hunt, a syllabus prep day for faculty, a date-a-book event, a maker space event, and other programs.

Many of these examples are focused on either making the library a student-friendly place or supporting traditional academic needs. Another trend has arisen as a result of the spike in student mental health concerns: providing outreach on wellness and health literacy (Kohout-Taylor and Klar 2020; Morgan 2020; Tringali 2021). As well, reflecting the definition of outreach to the unaffiliated local community provided by Schneider (2003), Salamon (2016) shares a case study of outreach particular to bridging academic/community divides with an Islamic Studies collection outreach project that included a book club, film series, lecture, and other events.

Assessment is another recent feature of the conversation on outreach, especially in light of neoliberal impulses to provide a return on investment (Nicholson 2017). We include two studies that reflect the types and difficulty of assessing library outreach. On one hand, assessment studies show that concerted efforts and additional resources put toward outreach can increase awareness of library services. For instance, Rust and Brown (2018) studied engagement metrics in their library. After hiring an outreach librarian and focusing efforts on branding, marketing, promotion, social media, etc., they found that 82 percent of their survey respondents were aware of library student success programming, an increase from previous years.

On the other hand, Rogerson and Rogers (2021) found that even a very large and popular community event—a liberal arts festival with a band and

several thousand attendees—did not increase reference and research help cases compared to holding no events the following year. This study is a good example of the difficulty in assessment because at this same institution, a different assessment of a scaled-down Harry Potter escape room event did achieve positive results for the library (106).

Another important element of outreach that is often covered in the literature is the management and administrative support of outreach in libraries, which can take many forms. Carter and Seaman (2011) found in their non-representative survey of librarians that 43 percent of respondents had a position at their institution with some amount of the role dedicated to outreach. Libraries without dedicated positions relied on committees and volunteerism often with very limited or nonexistent budgets and administrative support. Relatedly, a challenge noted by respondents was the reliance on committees and the lack of clear outreach goals. A recent content analysis of job advertisements for outreach librarians finds similar themes as Carter and Seaman with a wide variety of responsibilities and job titles muddying the waters for the essential competencies of such a role (Metzger and Jackson 2022).

We observed two gaps in the scholarship on outreach. The first is that outreach assessment studies can in essence be tautological in that they claim to “reach students,” and they find—through survey, attendance, etc.—that reaching students has indeed occurred. Is it not bound to, if one is reaching out to students? A second problem is that most outreach assessment studies report positive results, rather than ambiguous results or even failures. We suggest that publishing more studies, whether showing success or difficulties in outreach, would be instructive and legitimizing, as the field presents an honest accounting of its work. The work of Rogerson and Rogers cited above is a rare and helpful example.

Knowing the recent and present state of the conversation on outreach, we now turn to our methods for answering the question: Why do we do outreach?

## Methodology

To undertake our inquiry, we conducted a comprehensive search of core library journals as indexed in LISTA (<https://www.ebsco.com/m/ee/Marketing/titleLists/lxh-coverage.htm>) for the keyword *outreach* in author-supplied keywords, titles, subject terms, or abstracts. As terms have evolved over the years, we conducted additional searches using older keywords, *orientation* and *library cooperation* in the same fields. LISTA includes indexed coverage of 453 library science journals with many of those titles including coverage back to the 1960s. While orientation and outreach efforts no doubt predate online LISTA coverage, the authors did not have access to a retrospective collection in library and information science beyond printed sources. In addition, based on our own professional knowledge of the field’s general history, we looked at the purpose statements of all journals listed in the References section below, as well as the webpages of the ALA, ACRL, and LOEX to glean their histories as far as we could. We supplemented this information with some written histories/remembrances by scholars in the field, such as Barbara Ford’s 2000 “Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture,” and Kathleen de la Peña McCook’s 2002 paper “Rocks in the Whirlpool,” which offers a historical perspective on the ALA.

As we found what we considered to be milestones, the criteria for which can be determined by when a clear turn or leap in the field of outreach – for example the 1981 distinction between *orientation* and *instruction* by LOEX. Upon determining a milestone, we added it as a new entry on a timeline, from oldest at the top to the most recent at the bottom (see table 1). This resulted in thirteen

significant milestones between 1958, where we saw outreach “begin” with the first major study of library cooperation in *Library Trends* and end (for now) in the current post-pandemic moment, with the creation of the *Journal of Library Outreach and Engagement*.

We acknowledge a few limitations of our study. First, we were open to a broad interpretation of *outreach* spanning the many existing definitions for fear of excluding important milestones that may have occurred before the term became more standardized in the 2010s (as per the 2011 ACRL Standards). Second, in creating a timeline and narrative understanding, we are in no way claiming an exhaustive history of the field, nor of outreach, but instead offer an earnest attempt to trace the concept of outreach in two ways: back in time as far as we could, and within the changing context of higher education in the 20th and 21st centuries. This leads us to the third limitation: We are interpreting all that we learn through the lens of our own experiences within public universities in the 21st century. This means our interpretation of outreach intentions and milestones is grounded in a certain historical moment; our perspective may therefore enable us to note shifts in US higher education and politics that scholars of the past may not have seen with the same clarity while living through it.

### **Results: Timeline and Narrative**

When reading the timeline presented in table 1 from left to right, note that the milestones occupy the left-hand column, with the right-hand columns containing explanations of the context and purpose of the milestone, sometimes directly quoted from a source for brevity. In our documenting of these milestones, we observed the influence of societal changes and their downstream effects on higher education, its libraries, and our outreach efforts.

According to Schneider (2003), an early understanding of *library cooperation* was that of libraries working together within a community, whether public, academic, special, or K–12 libraries. While our analysis is exclusive to academic libraries, outreach historically included cross-library cooperation as seen in the 1958 special issue of the journal *Library Trends*, which suggests that librarians were considering how they could reach other libraries. In 1965, the ACRL conducted one of its first large-scale studies of academic libraries and determined that 94 percent of academic libraries provided services to community members; further, the study provided additional information about the range of practices libraries were using to reach their communities in terms of borrowing privileges and other practical matters (200).

Before the end of the 1960s, the ALA Council established the Coordinating Committee on Library Service to the Disadvantaged, which was rooted in inclusivity, access, and commitment to literacy for all. According to de la Peña McCook (2002), the creation of this committee and other efforts concerning inclusion were part of a greater shift in the US ideals and included the Higher Education Act signed by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, which infused federal funding into education at all levels. There were booming numbers of college-enrolled students in the post-war era, as well as gains made in access to educational opportunities during the Civil Rights movement as well (43). The name of the committee was changed in 1980 to the Office of Library Outreach Services, with the stated purpose of promoting services to “urban and rural poor, ethnic minority groups, the underemployed, school dropouts, the semiliterate and illiterate and those isolated by cultural differences” (Ford 2000, par. 7).

Milestones	Purpose & Context
1958: Library Trends journal devoted an entire issue to “library cooperation” in January 1958, in an issue called “Building Library Resources through Cooperation.”	The issue focused on cooperation among academic libraries as well as between libraries of different types and cooperative efforts between libraries in the US and Europe (Schneider 2003, 200).
1965: Among the first large studies of outreach, or serving those beyond traditional academic library patrons, the ACRL conducted a nationwide survey of 1,110 academic libraries.	The primary topics of interest include community users and their access to the library, how community users are defined, what borrowing privileges they have, and methods of safe-guarding collections. The study found that 94 percent of academic libraries do provide some or all of the above services to most community members (i.e., non-affiliated users), although most imposed restrictions (Schneider 2003, 200).
1968: The ALA Council established the Coordinating Committee on Library Service to the Disadvantaged, which evolved by 1980 to become the Office for Library Outreach Services, which remained so until 2000 and which was rooted in inclusivity, access, and commitment to literacy for all.	Library influence in the Higher Education Act under Lyndon Johnson in 1965 resulted in the creation of a National Advisory Commission on Libraries in 1966. This helped to unite libraries’ and the public’s understanding of the importance of outreach and literacy. It also directed federal funding to literacy outreach programs at a crucial time when education was experiencing its biggest spike in enrollment of the post-war period, working class people had ready access to education for the first time, and the Civil Rights movement opened up education opportunities to communities that were previously excluded (de la Peña McCook 2002, 43).
1971: LOEX Founded after the “First Annual Conference on Library Orientation.”	“The initial 1971 conference had been held as a result of Eastern Michigan University’s librarians’ desire to share the knowledge and the information that they were developing as a part of their “library outreach” program in the early 1970s [...] These events were among the first stirrings of the beginning of the modern library instruction movement” (Shirato 1999, 215).
1980: the 1968 ALA committee evolved to Office of Library Outreach Services.	“The purpose of the Office was to promote the provision of library service to the urban and rural poor of all ages and to people discriminated against because they belong to minority groups; to encourage the development of user-oriented informational and educational library services to meet the needs of the urban and rural poor, ethnic minority groups, the underemployed, school dropouts, the semiliterate and illiterate and those isolated by cultural differences; to ensure that librarians and others have information, access to technical assistance, and continuing education opportunities to assist them in developing effective outreach programs” (Ford 2000, par. 7).

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the Origins and  
Evolution of Outreach  
in Academic Libraries,**  
*continued*

Milestones	Purpose & Context
1981 LOEX changed its name and focus from "Orientation" to "Instruction."	"Changing the title of the conference and the proceedings was the decision of Carolyn Kirkendall who led LOEX from 1975 to 1986 (Kirkendall 1982). By this time it was evident that the term 'library instruction' had become dominant and was separate from 'outreach,' and it continues to this day to be the most commonly used term" (Shirato 1999, 216).
1995: The ALA Office of Outreach Library Services changed to Office for Literacy and Outreach Services and emphasized diversity within members of the profession.	"The resolution identified OLOS for work increasing library service to the unserved and underserved; promoting literacy; advocating full intellectual participation for all members of the public; making it possible for minority librarians to be active in ALA through liaison work with ethnic affiliates and the Council Committee on Minority Concerns and Cultural Diversity; work with the Social Responsibility and Ethnic Materials and Information Exchange Round Tables; and development of publications and programs on outreach, literacy, and community information" (de la Peña McCook 2002).
2001: Midwinter ACRL President's Discussion Forum highlights the importance of critical campus partnerships as a basis for outreach.	Citing examples from three large public institutions, the report encourages academic librarians to plan library programs and services in response to community needs and wants (McKinstry and Garrison 2001, par. 1).
2011: The creation of the Association of Library Communications & Outreach Professionals, later renamed Library Communications Conference in 2014.	"ALCOP aims to connect public and academic library professionals engaged in marketing, public relations, special events, fundraising, outreach initiatives, and program development for libraries [...] focusing exclusively on the best practices of library communications and outreach programs" (Salamon 2016, 2).
2011: ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education are created and include outreach in Standard 9.	Standard 9 reads: "Libraries engage the campus and broader community through multiple strategies in order to advocate, educate, and promote their value. 9.1 The library contributes to external relations through communications, publications, events, and donor cultivation and stewardship. 9.2 The library communicates with the campus community regularly. 9.3 Library personnel convey a consistent message about the library and engage in their role as ambassadors in order to expand user awareness of resources, services, and expertise" (ACRL 2011).
2014: The ACRL Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group was established at the Spring Executive Committee Meeting.	The charge reads: "to provide a forum for discussion regarding effective communication methods and outreach initiatives, including marketing strategies and strategic relationship building, that academic and research libraries utilize to disseminate information about their value, events, services, and resources and to engage the communities they serve" (ACRL 2022).

Milestones	Purpose & Context
2019: Diaz’s concept map united many definitions of outreach.	“In academic librarianship, outreach is work carried out by library employees at institutions of higher education who design and implement a variety of methods of intervention to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, spaces, collections, and issues (e.g. various literacies, scholarly communication, etc.). Implemented in and outside of the library, outreach efforts are typically implemented periodically throughout the year or as a single event. Methods are primarily targeted to current students and faculty, however, subsets of these groups, potential students, alumni, surrounding community members, and staff can be additional target audiences. In addition to library-centric goals, outreach methods are often designed to support shared institutional goals such as lifelong learning, cultural awareness, student engagement, and community engagement” (Diaz 2019, 191).
2020: The Journal of Engagement and Outreach published its first issue.	The editors write that the purpose is “to create new knowledge that underscores how library outreach and engagement enhances societal good and challenges oppressive conditions” (Thacker et al 2020).

Table 1: Timeline of outreach

During this same period of the mid-century higher education boom, LOEX was founded in 1971, with its initial purpose to share practices related to library orientation for new students, many of whom were entering higher education after military service or from the working class for the first time. Ten years later, LOEX distinguished between orientation and instruction in concept, suggesting that each arm took on its own dimension as a sub-field (Shirato 1999).

In 1995, The Office of Outreach Library Service revised its name and stated mission again, for the first time emphasizing diversity within the membership of the profession, “making it possible for minority librarians to be active in ALA through liaison work with ethnic affiliates and the Council Committee on Minority Concerns and Cultural Diversity” (de la Peña McCook 2002).

At the turn of the millennium, the term neoliberalism begins to creep into critiques and commentary of US higher education (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2000; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Davies, Gottsche and Bansel, 2006). Ian Beilin (2016) summarizes the complex theory of neoliberalism when applied to libraries as one “whose policies are guided by the imperative of the market in the strictly economic sense,” meaning that the need to justify an institution’s or organization’s existence shifted to a near-complete emphasis on using data and a focus on return on investment—rather than, for example, considering mission and education as central factors of justification. This is a significant (and foreboding) shift in perception and behavior on the part of universities that also coincides with the digitization of resources. These two changes in higher education bear out in the narrative of library outreach.

For instance, the next milestone in 2001 is an emphasis within the ACRL Midwinter President’s Discussion Forum on the importance of critical campus partnerships as a basis for outreach (McKinstry and Garrison 2001, par. 1). From this point, we contend that the timeline and narrative reflect reactions to the effects of neoliberalism on institutions and their cultures, a main response



being that academic libraries' outreach happens within the campus and not beyond it. We will see that this reaction is a necessary one based on several changes in higher education, including 1) fewer full-time faculty, 2) data-driven decision-making, 3) changing student attitudes in regards to the purpose of higher education, and 4) a self-service shift for students and employees with the introduction of technologies such as learning management systems. These changes which will be explained in the next section on neoliberalism.

In 2011, the Association of Library Communications & Outreach is established with the stated purpose of "connect[ing] public and academic library professionals engaged in marketing, public relations, special events, fundraising, outreach initiatives, [etc.] (Salamon 2016, 2). Additionally in 2011, the ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education are created and include outreach in Standard 9, which focuses on efforts of outreach and consistent communication from libraries to their constituents (ACRL 2011). In 2014, the Association of Library Communications & Outreach is renamed the Library Communications Conference, and the ACRL Library Marketing and Outreach Interest Group is established with a charge to "provide a forum for discussion regarding effective communication methods and outreach [...] that academic and research libraries utilize to disseminate information about their value, events, services, [etc.] (ACRL 2022). This marks the first time in our observations of the history that the purpose of outreach is designed for the library's benefit and visibility—such as by demonstrating a return on investment of resources as demanded by neoliberal university administrators—rather than previously stated purposes of expanding literacy to the general population. This is an important nuance and distinction: libraries, like many other units within universities in this moment, are reacting to the demands of the neoliberal university.

### **What's Neoliberalism Got to Do With It?**

Lori Goff (2013) states it succinctly: "Universities today are emulating corporate practices and directives." (102) The effects are severalfold, as we have suggested above and which we explain further here.

More and more often managerial practices such as reliance on lower-paid contingent adjunct instructors, who often juggle multiple jobs and institutions and often cannot make curricular decisions. These practices affect the ability of libraries to make important curricular and pedagogical connections across campus, resulting in a need to increase outreach directly to students, given the difficulty in gaining the attention of the dwindling faculty.

In addition, the emergence of data analytics in business filtered to higher education, and universities became more accountable to their stakeholders in the era of Big Data, with state funding tied to performance measures such as enrollment, graduation rates, etc. Note that state funding was in decline even before an insistence on tying funding to outcomes. Hence, usage data, assessment, and other quantitative accountability measures increased in importance in higher education, edging out conceptions of the intrinsic value of education for the public good. This trend was accelerated and institutionalized in libraries with the ACRL Value of Academic Libraries Project, which supported library projects seeking to prove the worth of libraries to administrations rather than the role they play in the lives of users themselves (Arellano Douglas 2020).

Dovetailing with a new distrust and devaluation of universities, intellectualism, and science by state governments, parents and students begin to see higher education as strictly a means to a degree leading to a career and a

paycheck (Nadworny and Larkin 2019). Respect and understanding for general education and the liberal arts decreases.

The shift to digital access of library materials and in the perception and treatment of students as “customers,” “users,” or “subscribers” plays a role as well. Technologies have replaced employee and student services in many industries in general, with self-service portals at the university replacing human interaction (and jobs) in student records, learning management systems, advising, instructional tutorials, library materials, and others, all of which create a social effect of employees and students expecting to access resources of many kinds alone and remotely.

## Outreach Today

We pick our timeline back up in 2019, when Diaz undertakes a concept analysis of the many definitions of outreach circulating in the literature. She provides an all-encompassing definition:

In academic librarianship, outreach is work carried out by library employees at institutions of higher education who design and implement a variety of methods of intervention to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, spaces, collections, and issues (e.g., various literacies, scholarly communication, etc.). Implemented in and outside of the library, outreach efforts are typically implemented periodically throughout the year or as a single event. Methods are primarily targeted to current students and faculty, however, subsets of these groups, potential students, alumni, surrounding community members, and staff can be additional target audiences. In addition to library-centric goals, outreach methods are often designed to support shared institutional goals such as lifelong learning, cultural awareness, student engagement, and community engagement. [...] This analysis positions librarians to make outreach work more intentional and ideally, more impactful, by encouraging librarians to identify key target audiences, determine clear goals and outcomes, and design relevant and effective outreach programs. (191)

In this definition, we can see that outreach has come to encompass a wide range of efforts aimed at a wide range of people “to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, [etc.]” and to carry out universities’ missions (Diaz 2019, 191). Nowhere in this definition remains the spirit of inclusivity or providing access to oppressed groups that older philosophies of outreach encompassed; instead, we see that outreach has become a reaction to the divided attention of a dwindling full-time faculty and to students who have been trained in self-service methods in many areas of their education. This is not a critique of Diaz, whose work reflects the reality of the moment.

However, we see a glimmer of the original spirit of outreach on the horizon with the founding of the *Journal of Engagement and Outreach* in 2020. Its editors write that its purpose is “to create new knowledge that underscores how library outreach and engagement enhances societal good and challenges oppressive conditions” (Christensen, Roberts, and Thacker 2020). The most recent publications in this journal speak to the strategic planning of outreach with an eye on sustainability (Bastone 2020; Colwell and O’Keefe 2021; Rodriguez 2020; Owens and Bishop 2019).

In trying to understand the relatively short history of outreach by tracing its purpose and shifting forms since 1958 and through the changes in US higher education over time, we suggest that the proliferation of outreach methods, as well as the increasing sense of its importance, has grown as the effects of neoliberalism on higher education have taken hold. The sheer variety of topics, forms, and planning approaches of outreach represents an earnest attempt to

simply gain the attention of our very own constituents, which perhaps became a distraction to the original purposes of access and equity.

In the end, we are not criticizing this turn and we are heartened by the new attention to equity via library outreach that this journal's mission statement suggests. Post-2020 there is evidence that recent diversity and inclusion statements are resulting in related programming and outreach (Bresnahan 2022). Like other facets of American life in a neoliberal regime, individual actions cannot be expected to overcome difficulties created by systemic degradations. In this case, our constituents' time, attention, and mental health have also been degraded.

In addition to the recentering of inclusion as a main value for outreach, a final milestone we share is an emphasis on strategy and sustainability to continue efforts within the neoliberal regime. For instance, in the most recent publications on outreach, articles present strategic advice, frameworks, or processes for outreach activities that speak to sustainability and perseverance in the face of shrinking budgets, workforce, and trust. For instance, Diaz (2019) encourages librarians "to identify key target audiences, determine clear goals and outcomes, and design relevant and effective outreach programs." Bastone (2020) suggests that an outreach plan needs to be aligned with the strategic priorities or mission of the library (26). Colwell and O'Keefe (2021) offer a top-level model for "providing a scalable, sustainable model for collaborative programming and event execution" (41), which includes organizational models for collaboration; a model for sharing folders, to-do lists, and timelines; and reflections on how all parts can adapt and change over time, with an emphasis on documentation to support the next group or project (55). Finally, at the time of this writing, the ACRL University Library Section Academic Outreach Committee has proposed new standards for Academic Library Outreach Work in July 2022. These proposed standards include advocacy, an emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and the use of marketing strategies.

We see these as heartening, politically savvy ways to maintain outreach today with its renewed focus on inclusivity. At the peak of neoliberalism and in the post-shutdown moment, the field re-aims its focus on the underserved in sustainable ways that do not continue to degrade our energies or educational values. The underserved in our public, teaching-focused institutions are often our very own students. Many of them are first-generation, Pell Grant-eligible students who are often underprepared for higher education and taking on burdensome debt to access it. They are unlikely, in many cases, to finish their degrees. How can we be smart and critical about our outreach to them? How do we show them the value of the resources their tuition dollars have paid for? How do we best support and teach them?

One answer is to rely on the narrative we present here, reminding us—our colleagues and our students of our origins: to lift up, to open up opportunities, to share the intrinsic value and joy of learning. In telling the story of outreach, we see libraries' potential to change, be critical of, and overcome systems of inequity that put dollars and efficiency before people. We should not sugar-coat it, even if we serve cookies. It is a story worth sharing.

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