Definition: **librarianship** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1. a profession concerned with organising collections of books and related materials in libraries and of making these resources available to readers and others.

2. the position or duties of a librarian.

Summary Article: **Libraries and Library Services**
from *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Out-of-School Learning*

In the United States, there are approximately 123,000 libraries, including public, academic, special collection, school, physical, and digital libraries. Librarians and other professionals who work in libraries are stewards of cultural, scientific, environmental, and historic heritages. As educators and facilitators of learning, library staff help 170 million visitors build knowledge; develop information, media, financial, civic, health, environmental, and other literacies; and increase 21st-century skills and self-efficacy. Staff use designed environments in their libraries such as makerspaces along with exhibits, specialized materials, and outreach programs to help learners of all ages. Librarians also make use of a variety of approaches and methods to close the digital divide for children, parents, caregivers, adults, and senior citizens. This entry first gives an overview of public libraries in the United States and then discusses the use of libraries by children, adolescents, and adults; the resources that libraries offer for learning; and efforts to measure and assess learning in libraries.

**Public Libraries**
The United States has more than 17,000 public libraries. Public libraries are community-based institutions that provide learning opportunities and information resources addressing health education, workforce development, and diverse local needs. Typically, these kinds of libraries are established under state laws or regulations and maintained with public funds. Public libraries have organized collections of printed and other materials. These libraries also have paid staff, established schedules of services available to the public, and facilities that are necessary to support their collections, staff, and schedules. In 2012, there were 487 public libraries in cities, 2,325 in suburbs, 2,209 in towns, and 4,061 in rural areas. More than 75% of the public libraries served populations of fewer than 25,000 people. In total, 4 million educational programs were offered to library users. Through these programs, public librarians helped patrons build learning and innovation skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, scientific and numerical literacy, cross-disciplinary thinking, and basic literacy.

**Learners in Libraries**

*Children and Adolescents*
The majority of library programs are for children. The library can be a family's primary place to access
computers, get online, participate in school readiness programs, and gain exposure to curricula
designed to help learners and their families address summer reading loss and school absenteeism. Many
library programs extend school-based lesson plans as well as align books and other resources with
specific topics of interest. Programs also feature the use of music and props to tap into the social,
emotional, and cognitive aspects of learning and development. These programs are used to promote
persistence, self-direction, critical thinking, and problem solving.

Going to the library can have a positive effect on academic outcomes in reading and science. However,
the most powerful predictor of library visitation and library card ownership is socioeconomic status.
Kindergartners living in affluent households are 3 times more likely to visit a library than children living in
impoverished households. (More than 60% of first graders living below the poverty level do not have a
library card.)

For adolescents, many public libraries have safe, innovative environments where youth can use
traditional and contemporary digital media, work with mentors from diverse disciplinary fields, and
connect with peers. The YOUmedia Learning Labs, for example, build on the anthropological research
of Mizuko (Mimi) Ito and the concept of connected learning. Connected learning is a conceptual
approach that addresses inequity in education, incorporates the use of digital media, and allows for the
pursuit of personal interests with the support of others. Connected learners link their learning and
interests to academic achievement, career success, and/or civic engagement. Modes of engagement
range from casual social engagement or “hanging out” to tinkering or “messing around” and deeper
engagement or “geeking out.” (All together, these modes are known as HOMAGO.)

At one learning lab in the Northeast, English language learners use digital media technology to learn
elements of the design process, including basic research, site visits to digital media centers, product
testing, and budgeting. Another lab on the West Coast supports digital creativity and communication in
an area with limited services for teens and few places to engage in creative projects and learning.
Across the labs, mentorship, in particular, has been found to help teens with self-expression,
productivity, and meaningful development of individual interests.

**Adult Learners**

Adults use the library to build their digital literacy, cognitive, and other skills. They take classes on
reading and math to learn English, become citizens, find out about health care and wellness, and get
jobs. Literacy, specifically, is a major area of interest for public librarians who work with adult learners.
(Survey results released in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Education and the Organisation for
Economic Co-operation and Development indicated that 36 million adults in the United States have low
literacy skills.) Librarians provide literacy instruction through informal discussions focused on science
topics, General Educational Development workshops and institutes, and conversation circles for people
with limited English-speaking skills. Librarians also share software for practicing speaking and writing
English along with other tools and best practice–based resources with adult educators who work in
other settings. Senior citizens, in particular, work frequently with librarians to access the Internet so
that they can connect with friends and family, build digital literacy, and get information about health and
government services.

**STEAM, Making, and Other Areas of Interest**

Libraries offer learners of all ages a rich variety of resources and instruction in science, technology,
engineering, the arts, and math (STEAM) topics to build patron curiosity and interest, address limited

[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/librarianship](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/librarianship)
proficiency in science and other disciplinary areas, and address the lack of representation of women
and people of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Makerspaces
are designed spaces in libraries that feature mentor-led experimentation, invention, creation, and
exploration through design thinking and project-based learning. These spaces are used by public
librarians to help families pursue their interests and collaborate with one another.

Researchers and librarians are working together to design tools and principles of practice that make
use of constructivist theories and other approaches to understand learning in libraries. This work
focuses on learning outcomes that have to do with problem solving in engineering and other subjects
along with the development of non-content-related skills. In general, libraries have become dynamic
spaces where learners of all ages are using laser cutters, knitting, creating puppets, keeping bees,
building 3D prototypes, and engaging in all sorts of design-based thinking projects.

**Measuring and Assessing Learning**

Measuring and assessing learning in libraries is an emerging field. Researchers and practitioners are
working to build capacity among library professionals, increase understanding about how learning in
public libraries is similar to or different from learning in academic settings or at home, and provide the
competencies required to facilitate meaningful library-based learning. Many professionals in library
settings use an outcomes-based approach to design activities for learners with specific expected or
intended outcomes such as increased teen engagement through the use of digital media or
participation in making activities. Some recent efforts have investigated how diverse visitors to
libraries make meaning and learn concepts through STEM-based exhibits and programming as well as
with digital and other tools. Other work has to do with increasing civic engagement or building skills
related to historical and cultural preservation.

In addition, more and more library workers are participating in continuing education efforts beyond the
master's and doctoral level such as through participation in the YOUmedia Community of Practice
network; the Coalition to Advance Learning in Archives, Libraries, and Museums; the STAR (Science-
Technology Activities and Resources) Library Education Network (STAR_Net); and other groups,
networks, and organizations. Library staff are increasingly working collaboratively across organizations
and geographic regions to develop strategies to make sense of big data, develop needs assessments,
and learn more about library visitors. Together, they are moving the field forward, building understanding
about how better to serve visitor needs and interests, characterize connected and other kinds of
learning, and design learning environments that support the development of 21st-century skills while
welcoming and sustaining patron interest and engagement.

**See also** Assessments and Assessment Issues; Connected Learning; Digital Literacies; Learning
Sciences; Open Educational Resources; STEAM-Based Approaches to Out-of-School Learning; 21st-
Century Skills

**Further Readings**

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