Environmental Scanning and observation of Neill Public Library  
Pullman, WA

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Abstract

This paper will deal with observations of Neill Public Library in Pullman, Washington. This paper looks at the demographics of the town, the external factors affecting the library, internal observations, and the three major areas of the library: children’s, teens/young adults, and adults.

In order better help a library, it is important to be able to observe things both inside the library as well as outside. This process is known as environmental scanning, which Evans and Ward (2007) say, “is a process for gathering information about activities, trends, relationships, competitors, potential dangers, and any other factors in the environment that could impact the organization” (p. 45). To do an environmental scan, one should observe a public library to gain an understanding of what goes on in a public library and familiarize one’s self with different operations. In this paper, the library that was observed will be discussed as well as environmental factors that may impact the library, the internal workings of the library, the patrons of the library, and lastly, final thoughts on the public library and its place in the community.

Neill Public Library

The public library that was observed for this paper was Neill Public Library (NPL). NPL is located 210 N. Grand Ave. in Pullman, Washington (Neill Public Library website, 2010). The library is located in downtown Pullman, in a building that was recently remodeled. “The South Fork of the Palouse River flows alongside” (Director of Library Services job description, 2008) part of the building to give a feeling of nature for Neill Public Library. Around the building there are three murals that are carved into the walls of the building. These murals are 3D and depict scenes from the Palouse, as well as an educational scene (Knowles, 1992). Also in the site of NPL is a “15-foot Victorian Street Clock with four 30-inch faces” (Knowles, 1992, p.1). Recently the library remodeled the front of the library and put in two-story glass windows, which brings in a lot of light into new sitting areas.

Demographics

NPL mainly serves the community of Pullman, which, according to the State Office of Financial Management estimate, has a population of “27,600” (Director of Library Services job description, 2008). Part of the population in Pullman comes from the students of Washington State University (WSU) which is located in the same town. In the fall semester of 2006, WSU’s student population was “18,423” (Pullman Washington 2007 Fact book, p. 7). The economy, historically was farming, but today it centers around two employers, WSU and Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories (SEL). WSU, as of 2007 employs 5,678 full and part time workers (Fact book, 2007, p. 7). SEL employs “about 1,080 people” (Fact book, 2007, p.8).

Pullman has quite a diverse population in relation to the surrounding county. The reason for this is that people come to work at SEL, WSU, and the University of Idaho, which is located in Moscow, Idaho eight miles away. The median age in Pullman is “22.5 years” (Fact book, 2007, p. 14) of age and unlike most of the US, “65.3%” (Fact book, 2007, p. 14) people in Pullman have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Most of Pullman is Caucasian, at 83.1%, according to the 2000 Census (Pullman Washington Population and Demographics Resources, 2010). The second largest race in Pullman is Asian with “8.48%” (Pullman Washington Population and Demographics Resources, 2010) of the population.

External environment of Neill Public Library

The external environment of Neill Public Library consists of many variables. They both hurt and help the library in many ones. Seven examples of external environmental variables include the location of Pullman, the size of Pullman, the location of NPL within the community of Pullman, the local budget, the Washington State budget, influence of WSU, and finally community support of NPL.

*Location and size of Pullman*

Pullman, located in Whitman County near the Washington and Idaho border. Most of Whitman County is rural and farming communities. In fact, Pullman is the largest town in Whitman County. Due to its location, Pullman is only near two minor highways and not near a major interstate. The impact of Pullman’s size and its location can impact NPL’s management in such a way that there may not be different ideas and people coming into the library both in terms of patrons and workers. This is contradicted, because WSU is present in Pullman, people from all over the world are coming to WSU to study and/or teach and many times bringing their families.

*Location of NPL within the community of Pullman*

NPL library is located on the edge of downtown Pullman and due to Pullman’s size, it is not likely one would miss the library, especially if they were driving north or south along Grand Avenue. Other times it may be possible to miss the library. However, NPL is in easy walking distance from all of downtown, as well as WSU. It is also on two major bus lines, the “I” and “J” routes and is about two blocks from the Pullman Transit transfer station (Pullman Transit Schedule Information, 2010). The bus system is important to how NPL is managed because this system brings in patrons from all over Pullman and by bringing those patrons, the library is accessed in different ways ranging from adults just wanting a book to read, school age children needing a place to go on the internet, to college students needing to do research.

*The local budget and the Washington State budget*

Like many cities and states around the country, Pullman and Washington State are no exceptions to the current economy. The current Pullman city budget is listed at “$45,910,767.00” (City of Pullman, Statistics, 2010). Just like other places, Pullman is affected by what the state does and right now the State is not doing well. According to HeraldNet.com (2010), “Washington’s budget deficit grew to about $2.8 billion” within the 2009-2010 budget years. Not having money impacts NPL in terms of services they offer, books and collections they buy, and the hours they operate. Already in the past year, NPL has had a reduction of hours of operation, which now includes being closed on Sundays. As of 2008, NPL’s collection is at “79,414” (City of Pullman Statistics, 2010) which includes magazines, books, DVDs, CDs, and books on tape.

*Influence of WSU and Community support of NPL*

WSU has a large influence over Pullman, mostly because it is the largest employer in the town. It also has influence over NPL in terms of patrons coming into the library. On one side there may not be as many students from WSU using NPL, on the other, NPL is publically funded and open to everybody, WSU not based on Evans and War’s (2007) definitions of “publically funded organizations offering services to some people” verses “common-weal organizations” (194). WSU impacts NPL’s management in who they hire for positions, who volunteers, and what type of collections they have to manage.

The Pullman community from the observations observed over a week’s period has embraced NPL. NPL does have a “Library Board” which has members from the community on it. This board has the duties such as the following: the “supervision and care of all library property; employ the library director and assistants as necessary; submit budget annually to City Council for approval; have control over library finances” (Boards and Committees, 2010) as well as many other duties. This board is one of two dominating forces in NPL’s management. The other will be discussed as part of the internal environment. Rubin (2004) writes, “if the society believes that reading, and by inference, literacy is important, than it is likely that libraries will have great support” (p. 300). This is very true in the Pullman community.

Neill Public Library and its internal environment

The organizational structure that is mostly like found in NPL is, as Evans and Ward (2007) call it a “common-weal “organization (p. 194). These types of organizations are funded by the people in forms of taxes, levies, and other public means and what they offer is open to anyone in the community (Evans and Ward, 2007). As for the internal organization of NPL, all that can be learned from observation is that there are several references librarians, a Youth Librarian, and a “Temporary Library Services Manager” (Neill Public Library, 2010). There are also many other workers and volunteers but it is unclear what role(s) they play in the library organization and management.

As Rubin (2004) writes, “the public library mission to serve the various ethnic communities” (p. 297) and this is what NPL does for Pullman. As mentioned earlier Pullman does have a diverse population and this, of course, affects the library population. During several observations, it was observed there were many different races of people and ages coming and going in the library. Along the same lines, just like in Pullman, there are many different age groups and this is well represented in the patrons of the library. The next couple of paragraphs will look at three different areas, children, teens/young adults, and adults and how NPL is working with its given demographics to improve the library.

*Children*

Walking into the library from either direction (there are two entrances), the children’s area is quite visible. It is colorfully decorated and has a play area, an aquarium, and books for all ages of children. Rubin (2004) writes that “a recent survey of adults found that 83 percent believed it was very important for the library to provide storyhours and other children’s programming” (p. 386). NPL does have children’s’ programming, however, there was no visible announcement or schedule of when those where within the library. On the other hand, this information is announced in both the local paper (the Moscow-Pullman Daily News) and in the *Community Update* which is a monthly publication that comes to households in Pullman (Theoretically every household in Pullman is suppose to receive it). This is one area where the library could improve. It could promote its children’s programming within the library more.

*Teen/Young Adult*

In NPL, the teen/young adult is for the most part separated from the children’s materials. Compared to the children’s collections, the teen/young collection is quite small and is tucked in a corner of the library and though it is easy to locate due to NPL having giant signs over each section. In Pullman, the age population of 15 to 19 years of age was, according to the 2000 US Census, the second highest demographic with “15.66%” (Pullman Washington Population and Demographics, 2010). It was observed that NPL does not have a whole lot of Teen/Young adult programming and this is definitely one area that could be improved vastly within the library as well as promotion outside the library. There is one part, however, that is going well for Neill. They have, in the last couple of years; really expanded on how many computers they have available solely for internet browsing. These stations appeal to the teen/young adult population looking for access to the computers (as well as other groups).

*Adults*

The adult population in Pullman is well and thriving, thanks in large part to WSU. The largest age population in Pullman is in this category of 20-24 years of age and is listed in the 2000 Census as “35.71%” (Pullman Washington Population and Demographics, 2010). The areas for the adults are the non-fiction, fiction, DVDs, CDs, and audio books, though children’s and teen/young adults are mixed in the last three as well. Each section in NPL is well advertised with, as mentioned above, a giant sign. Adult programming, classes, and help with such things as taxes are well publicized in the *Community Update* but not all that well within the library.

Final Thoughts

Neill Public Library is a good library; especially considering the size of Pullman and with the presence of Washington State University. It has a very nice collection for its size and from what is known and observed NPL has incorporated and made use of Pullman’s diverse nature. The organizational structure of the library is that of a common-weal in that it is publically funded through the government and is open to the community. The external factors that play a part in the library’s well being and organization are its location, its place within the state and local budgets, the location of Pullman, and the influence of WSU and community input. These factors are also play a part in the internal organization and management of Neill Public Library. Finally, this paper looked at the different types of patrons in Neill Public Library and how they are viewed and valued. The Children’s services are probably the most valued, the adult collections somewhere in the middle, and the teen/young adults are probably under-valued and would be one place that needs to be presented more to the public.

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