What the WMU Library Can Do for Alumni

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Every year, as graduation approaches, we get asked about alumni access to library resources. Not long ago, the answer was easy --none-- because we did not have the technology in place to do much in the way of remote access. This has changed rapidly in the past year, but as far as alumni access is concerned, the answer has improved from none to not much. The obstacles at this point are legal, and ultimately, financial.

We hope, with help from alumni, that we can improve our support to them. At this point, we would like to make clear what access we can and can not provide to alumni, and why, and we will conclude with recommendations for improving our position. Let's start with the most obvious:

**Lloyd's List**

WMU Library at this time can not legally give alumni online access to *Lloyd's List*. A subscription to Lloyd's web site *lists* for £1955 per person per year. Lloyd's offers discounted institutional site licensing for thirty-five thousand pounds, which is a better deal, but still expensive. The last time we spoke with a Lloyd's representative on the phone, he was willing to extend access to all enrolled
students, but not to alumni, for sixteen thousand pounds. That is as low as they are willing to go. Lloyd’s believes what they sell is worth what they are asking, but it is still too costly for us to provide simultaneous access to everyone on campus, let alone to all graduates.

Most of the popular trade journals fall into the same category as Lloyd’s, such as, American Shipper, Tradewinds, and Fairplay. We challenge them to institute a better pricing structure for online access, but in the meantime, we simply can not accommodate the desire of alumni to have gratis access via the WMU subscription. Keep in mind, however, that visitors, including visiting alumni, can access these titles from our on-campus archives.

Ebrary, Proquest, and other "academic databases"

We need to check with representatives of the individual databases. We lease "site-licenses" of these resources, meaning that everyone on campus, or authenticated in the campus system, can have access simultaneously. Very often the price is based on campus population. Keep in mind there is a big difference between 200 students (when we have two classes in session) and three thousand alumni. With some databases, three thousand users might be within our current subscription limits. In others, we would have to pay a higher fee.

Clarkson’s

Not a chance. WMU gets a great deal for current students, for academic purposes only.

Refworks and Easybib

These services you can have lifelong as an alumnus of WMU. Any bibliographies you have made you may retain, as well as build new ones, and you can share them.

WMU Google Apps

As an alumnus, you may retain your WMU gmail, and use Google documents, and the other Google Apps that WMU has licensed. For access to associated third party applications, such as SlideRocket and LucidChart, alumni will have to contact WMU IT.
Reference services

WMU staff will try to assist with reference questions, if we have time. You can always ask, but the more specific your question the better chance of getting an answer. We could scan a book chapter or a journal article, but we will not be able to answer broad, open-ended research questions. We can point you to possible resources and suggest search strategies. Service to currently enrolled students will of course take precedence over alumni reference services.

Need for direction and funding from alumni association

It must be understood that whatever content and services the library currently does not offer to alumni is not on account of a lack of willingness to help. It is a matter of budget and copyright law. The latter can almost always be overcome if the former is sufficiently funded. A strong alumni association, perhaps with a standing committee on library or information services, is the first step in extending the service from this point. This committee should be capable of raising funds as well as setting the priorities to spend it. As for the library staff, with a sufficiently dedicated committee that can speak for alumni on matters of information access, we can work to provide access in one of the following ways, depending on the vendor with whom we are dealing:

- **Permit alumni access at no additional cost.** In the case of locally produced information, such as conference proceeding papers, dissertations, and maritime information on the open web that we have captured and cataloged, that access is guaranteed. In the case of commercial databases, if three thousand users are within the limits of a current contract, then by all means, we shall accommodate alumni with access to that particular database or service. The library staff needs to identify the resources that fall into this category and devise means of permitting alumni access without permitting them access to content that is currently restricted to enrolled students.

- **Raise money for more access.** In many cases, the simplest means of providing access for more people will be to pay more money. Depending on the database, it could be more feasible for the association to make regular donations to cover all alumni, or it could be more cost effective if individual alumni pay a reasonable fee for extra services. The key thing to keep in mind is that WMU Library is merely passing on the cost it takes on in adding more users. The money to pay for it has to come from somewhere.

- **Create library consortia.** We recently put out the call for all libraries who maintain maritime collections and provide support to maritime researchers to join us in the creation of a Maritime Librarian’s Association. We will step up our efforts to make this happen in 2013. Library consortia can often get better deals through collective licensing of databases. It
might be that there is a library nearby where you live or work that can join us, or there is a
library already established in your place of work. Or perhaps we can help your place of
business establish a library. Here again, WMU library needs guidance and support from the
alumni to be of assistance.

- **Broker with information vendors on behalf of institutions that alumni are affiliated with.** In
  some cases, the only viable way to provide access to something desired by alumni is via a
direct contract between the information vendor and the "end user" customer. WMU library
staff can help broker deals with vendors who will not work with consortiums and will not
permit remote access for alumni under a WMU license. If needed, we can help institutions
set up their own "libraries" with standing in the library community to participate in Interlibrary
Loans and document sharing programs, and to contract with database vendors on library
terms, which are usually more favorable than terms offered to individual subscribers.

**Conclusion**

WMU Library service for alumni is better than nothing but less than desirable. To move forward
requires help from the alumni themselves. Financial support and the setting of priorities are the two
most critical steps to extending our library services to alumni.

We need also mention that there are highly desirable services we do not yet have, even for currently
enrolled students, as they are services that do not yet exist. We believe WMU Library can work on
creating these services -- for the benefit of the maritime community at large -- but we have no hope
of success without the active support of our alumni and the network of maritime professionals with
whom they are associated. That is a discussion *The Maritime Librarian* can save for its next
installment, after graduation, should your interest as an alumni continue past the 2nd of December.