I lay on my kitchen floor trying to stay cool in the oppressive low-pressure swelter that accompanies Category 4 hurricanes. It was September 2005, and Hurricane Katrina had hit New Orleans the day before. Though I was in Pensacola, Fla., some 170 miles east of where Katrina’s destructive eye had come ashore, the storm was huge and had prodigiously supplied 16 hours of hurricane-force winds, rain and destruction to my Gulf locale. No AC, no lights, no power, no work and no fuel to escape…for nearly a week! From my recumbent position on the sweating linoleum, I was listlessly “watching” local news coverage of the disaster on a small, battery-operated TV above me on the kitchen table.

I will never forget the images that played out on the screen. Out of the fetid, shoulder-high water that had swamped the 9th Ward of that city walked a dazed young mother carrying two small children in her arms. The camera followed her as she wearily, dangerously and without aid made her way out of the monstrous flood and up a steep entrance ramp to Interstate 10, which in its elevated and dry safety loomed above. Out of the hellish sludge she came to higher and safer ground, where a news crew had positioned itself for coverage of this human disaster. Her dramatic, slow-motion journey out of the miasma was agonizing to watch. As she approached safety, tears streaming down her face, utter despair in her voice, she pleaded, “Won’t somebody PLEASE tell us what’s happening?”

Here, surrounded by the wretched circumstances of imminent death and demise for her and her children, this woman wasn’t asking for water, food or other physical succor. She was asking for the comfort of information, for knowledge, for understanding what was happening to her. More than anything, her need to know and understand what was happening to her was paramount, more basic and primordial than all the other, more obvious physical needs she clearly had.

Notwithstanding the sheer enormity of the human tragedy before me, I was struck by this need to have information before all else. It immediately reinforced a notion I had long held that there is a fundamental human need to understand. And not merely to know things for all the practical ends we typically surmise, but to integrate our bits of knowledge, when we have them, into a more comprehensive understanding of human experience. It seems, to me at least, that to understand is an innate human need, pleasure and longing.

Integrating information and knowledge into understanding is a lifelong process. Full understanding (omniscience?) appears to be a limit we approach, continuously seek, but never attain. But we try; it is our way. Natural selection seems to have outfitted us with a highly evolved “signal processing device” that is importantly plastic in its design and ability to receive, store and process many different kinds of “signals” that richly populate our experience. The human mind seems to be continuously processing the “signals,” or ideas, that it receives, integrating them through critical-thinking processes into new, different and sometimes bigger and better “signals.” The stronger, more impressive of these signals seem to have a greater influence on our thinking.

Over the eons, the “signals”—data, information and knowledge—have grown and today come at us in much greater numbers and at breakneck speed, with the potential of flooding the integration processes of critical thinking necessary to understanding. We might say that there’s greater potential for “signal dissonance” with more and more diverse signaling!

Technology has always been an indispensable handmaiden in the creation and communication of human thought. From earliest prehistory down to the present day, it has been the essential means by which the product of
Digital technologies are of an order and form to transform the human quest for enhanced understanding. More than ever, our modern academic libraries are challenged to embrace these technologies and use them in ways that optimize their potential for developing and delivering the highest quality intellectual content. Upon examination, what we find is that today’s libraries are confronting and meeting that challenge in salubrious ways, creating new technology-based services that are imaginatively advancing our primal human yearning to know and understand.

For the individual, all of his or her own human experience is available for processing. It is the mission of cultural institutions to acquire and make accessible the best of all other forms of human experience—past and present “signals”—for the individual’s benefit. It has been the mission of libraries to receive, store and “transmit” all manner of signals. Moreover, as these signals are received and “processed,” the processing activity itself builds additional individual processing capacity.

Human understanding is built one person at a time and we all begin as blank slates. Fortunately, we all start with a mind capable of prodigious feats of knowledge integration. It has been the historic mission of libraries to ensure that those integration processes are well supplied with rich and varied forms of quality ideas, or “signals,” and that these are made freely available to all.

Understanding requires that the “signals” be strong, clear and widely distributed; the “signal processing device” turned on and tuned in.
The collaborative research of a WCU librarian and a political science faculty member into library services in rural Western North Carolina jails has inspired an initiative with Fontana Regional Library system to diversify and update book collections in regional detention centers.

Guiding the library improvement initiative are Jill Ellern, systems librarian at Hunter Library, and Liz Gregg, assistant county librarian at Jackson County Public Library, part of the Fontana Regional Library system. Gregg and her coworkers are working to secure books and financial donations to support libraries within detention centers in Macon and Jackson counties.

The librarians are seeking paperback materials in good condition that are appropriate for different reading levels, languages and ethnicities and that support education, work and treatment programs. The most pressing needs are for popular fiction; Westerns; educational materials for basic math, science, GED preparation or continuing education, legal forms and self-help titles, said Gregg. They secured a local newspaper subscription for inmates to share in the Macon County Detention Center. “We are looking for ways to regularly provide these items to the jails,” said Gregg. “Donations given to us have been greatly appreciated to help us provide this valuable service to the community.”

The initiative developed after Ellern spoke with head librarians as part of a research project centered on library services in WNC jails that she undertook with Karen Mason, associate professor of criminal justice. The stories of friends who worked as jailers had left them pondering what life would be like if they were incarcerated. As avid readers, they were particularly interested in the prospect of having more time to read. “However, we found that the reality is not what you might imagine,” said Ellern. “There are very limited reading options.”

She and Mason met with jail administrators in Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson and Macon counties over a period of several months to learn about their library services and policies, to examine their book collections and to look for ways they could help the detention centers provide quality library services. The researchers were interested in how book collections fit into the overall management of the jails and the potential threats they presented. Hardback books were not allowed in inmate living areas for safety reasons, and some jails also restricted magazine and newspaper use. Ellern and Mason also were interested in the type, quantity, quality and acquisition of books available. A review of prior research suggested that jail reading materials for inmates have the potential, if carefully selected, to promote literacy, learning and personal development, said Ellern.

Jail administrators who participated in the study shared that library services are important in giving inmates something productive to do, and they noted that happier inmates contribute to a safer environment. Some also described access to reading materials as a right rather than a privilege, and noted that the role of jails, unlike prisons, is custody and care, rather than punishment, according to a paper Ellern and Mason published about their research.

However, they also described the enormous challenges jails face in providing even rudimentary library services, said Ellern. The facilities lack not only funding to purchase materials but also space for books. Several jail libraries consisted of a single movable book cart, and in one case the collection was in a locker. In addition, the facilities have limited staff available to maintain the collections and coordinate library services. “Most of the collections could be described as a combination of religious, Western and romance titles,” said Mason. Ellern said she was surprised not to recognize many titles among the paperbacks, which were very used and in various stages of disrepair. “This is not your standard library collection,” said Ellern. “These items are used up and must be continually refreshed.”

Although individuals and some organizations have made donations to detention center libraries in the past, none of the institutions had ongoing partnerships or programs to acquire new materials. Jail administrators expressed interest in forming partnerships with local libraries to improve their services, which led Ellern and Gregg to begin working together to launch the current jail library assistance initiative, said Ellern. Lt. Steve Stewart, jail administrator at the Macon County Detention Center, said assistance with the jail library is greatly appreciated. “This has been a tremendous help to us and especially to the inmates,” said Stewart.

Gregg and Ellern presented last fall at the recent North Carolina Library Association conference about their experience so far and findings from a paper by Ellern and Mason, titled “Library Services to Inmates in the Rural County Jails of Western North Carolina,” which appeared in the North Carolina Libraries journal. In the paper, Ellern and Mason noted that WNC jail collections might be enhanced with books inviting inmates to think about topics such as education, life enrichment, literacy and resources for job seeking, as well as re-entry into society after being jailed, mental and physical health, and self-education. “With inmates having to serve sometimes up to two years in these county jails, they have time on their hands to engage and improve their lives, if given the chance,” said Ellern.

For more information on the project, go to http://jailswnc.wordpress.com.
As we look back at the history of Hunter Library, we remember three famous women who came to WCU, largely because of the determined efforts of one librarian to create an exciting cultural life on campus. Lilian B. Buchanan believed the library's role in student life should extend beyond books and reading. She felt that students ought to have opportunities to meet the celebrities of the day. Buchanan, who served as the college librarian from 1931 until 1967, organized, coordinated and served as chair of a group called the Lyceum Committee, which hosted events on campus. More than 65 years later, the original idea continues today as the WCU Lectures, Concerts and Exhibitions series.

Buchanan and her committee brought three of the world's most famous women to Cullowhee. Margaret Truman, daughter of President Harry S. Truman, came in 1949. Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the late war-time President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was here in 1958. Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson, was First Lady at the time of her 1967 visit.

Margaret Truman, a 24-year-old aspiring soprano, performed in Hoey Auditorium before an audience of 1,000 people, mostly students. Her $1,500 performance fee was paid for with student activity fees. Truman was the only child of Harry S. Truman, who became President in 1945 on the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt and served until 1953. Doted on by her father, she toured around the country to perform, receiving mixed reviews from music critics. She eventually gave up singing and wrote 32 books, including a successful series of mystery novels set in Washington, D.C.

Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, came to campus in 1958 as a guest speaker for a cultural events series. She gave a one-hour lecture in Hoey Auditorium titled “Russia As I Saw It,” then attended a reception at Hunter Library. The longest-serving First Lady in history, she was an advocate for social causes throughout her life and was known to care deeply about the plight of the underprivileged. President Roosevelt served as President from 1933 until his death in 1945, leading the country through the Great Depression and to victory in World War II.

Lady Bird Johnson came to Cullowhee in 1967 and presided over a dedication ceremony celebrating an expansion to the library. Her husband, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, became President after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 and served until 1969. He is remembered as the President responsible for laws upholding civil rights, public broadcasting, Medicare, Medicaid, environmental protection, and aid to urban and rural development, the arts and education. The expansion to the library had received federal funding during Johnson's administration. Mrs. Johnson also visited Canada School while in the area.

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Library Honors Top Student Workers

BY BETHANY KETTING | BKETTING@WCU.EDU

You may have noticed the smiling faces of WCU students on posters located in the library elevator and on the ends of the book stacks on the main floor. At Hunter Library, we choose our two most outstanding student workers each year and honor them by highlighting their contributions on printed posters displayed in our building. Without these student workers, the library would not be the place we all know and love. Student workers help in nearly every function of library operations. For the 2013-14 year, library supervisors chose Lauren Rybak of Winston-Salem and Sarah Ducharme of Hendersonville.

Lauren, an elementary education major, has worked in our circulation department for four years. She has had her hand on many books over the years and her hands in many library projects. Her supervisor, Shirley Finegan, said: “Lauren’s creative talents and support just don’t seem to end, and that creativity and hard work have made the library a warmer and better place.” Lauren hopes to combine her love of children, education and libraries in her future career as a teacher.

“There is nothing that Sarah won’t do,” said Dana Wood, Sarah’s supervisor in the acquisitions area of the library. “She loves to learn different aspects of the library and our work flows and procedures. I have been very fortunate to have worked with her. Other departments’ faculty and staff are all just as grateful for all her help.” Sarah plans to turn that same flexibility into an even bigger asset upon graduation. She hopes to gain experience in psychology, her chosen field, by volunteering before heading to graduate school. Her willingness to take on any task will definitely serve her well in those endeavors.

Volunteer Work in the Great Smokies Takes Librarian Back in Time

One afternoon each week and for several hours on the weekends, you can find the library’s collection development librarian, Katy Ginanni, out and about in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For several years, Ginanni, an avid park volunteer, has been responsible for tending the vegetable garden at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center in Cherokee. Occasionally she also takes care of the flower beds at the Mountain Farm Museum, which is part of the center. For special events, she’s often dressed in mid-1800s-period fashions and may be found demonstrating mountain life traditions, such as cooking up a kettle of apple butter. “I enjoy talking with park visitors and answering their questions,” said Ginanni. “There are often questions I don’t know the answer to, and I sometimes come back to the library to research for answers. So, work life intersects with volunteer life.”
Sarah Steiner Appointed Head of Research and Instruction Services

Sarah K. Steiner, a librarian at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Ga., for the past nine years, is the new head of Research and Instruction Services at Hunter Library. Steiner will lead a department of nine librarians who provide in-person and online consultation at the reference desk and teach library instruction classes.

At Georgia State University, Steiner was an associate professor at University Library. As subject specialist and virtual services librarian for the past four years, she provided online and in-person consultation and coordinated the library’s social media, chat and texting reference services. From 2005 until 2009, she was the Learning Commons librarian at Georgia State.

She has researched, presented and published widely on topics ranging from instruction for students on library services and resources, to social networking, blogging, and career management for professional librarians. She serves as the social media editor for College and Research Libraries, the official research journal of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Steiner is the author of Strategic Planning for Social Media in Libraries, a book in the Library and Information Technology Association’s Tech Set series, published in 2012. She was honored nationally in 2011 by Library Journal with its “Mover and Shaker Award.”

She earned her bachelor’s degree in English literature and master’s in library information systems at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Fla., and her master’s degree in English literary studies at Georgia State University.

Research and Instruction Services Welcomes New Librarian

Elizabeth Marcus, a member of the circulation staff at WCU’s Hunter Library for the past eight years, has a new position, research and instruction librarian. In her new job, which began April 15, Marcus also serves as the undergraduate experience librarian.

A native of Robbinsville, her first job at the library was as a student assistant in 2005 while she was attending WCU. After graduating in 2006 with a bachelor’s degree in history, she joined the full-time library staff and has served at various times in circulation, serials, special collections and research and instruction services. While working at the library, she earned her master’s degree in library science in 2011 through North Carolina Central University’s online graduate program.

Skene Named Digital Initiatives Librarian

Elizabeth Skene is the library’s new digital initiatives librarian. She comes to WCU from the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, where she has served as curator of collections since 2011. Prior to her position there, she was a museum assistant at the University of Michigan Herbarium in Ann Arbor from September 2009 until December 2010.

She also has worked as a circulation desk assistant at White Library of Spring Arbor University and the Ann Arbor District Library, both in Michigan. Additionally, she was an intern at the Rare Books and Special Collections Library at the American University in Cairo, Egypt from May until July 2010. From April until October 2008 she was a Peace Corps volunteer, serving in Botevgrad, Bulgaria, teaching English as a foreign language.

She holds a master of science in information degree from the University of Michigan and a bachelor’s degree in English and speech from Spring Arbor University.

At Hunter Library, Skene will be responsible for creating and managing a growing digital collection of historically significant materials that focuses on the history of WCU, Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachia.
Ruby Banerjee, library specialist in the Research and Instruction Services department as well as a noted chef and culinary educator, helped lead fundraising efforts the weekend of October 18-20, 2013, to help cover the cost of local midwife Betsy Swift’s travel to Hinche, Haiti, to train midwives. While two yoga instructors, Chad Hallyburton and Jennie Ashlock, conducted yoga sessions over the weekend, Banerjee prepared a seven-course Indian dinner served Saturday evening at St. David’s Episcopal Church in Cullowhee. The money from the fundraiser enabled Swift, a volunteer for Midwives for Haiti, to spend a week with volunteers from all over the world to educate and train Haitian midwives. Along with Hallyburton and Banerjee were their spouses Ann Hallyburton, research and instruction librarian and liaison to the health professions, and Debasish Banerjee, professor of computer information systems, who helped with the fundraising event.


Katy Ginanni, collection development librarian, and Tim Carstens, associate dean of library services, presented at the Electronic Resources and Libraries Conference in held in Austin, Tex., in March. The title of the presentation was “Here, There, and Everywhere: Where Do MARC Records for eBooks Come From?” They were joined by representatives from YBP, formerly Yankee Book Peddler, and Springer Publishing. The four discussed the complications of ebook purchases, primarily the variety of types of purchases (for example, single, title by title; subject collections; publisher collections; patron-driven acquisitions plans), the variety of sources from which MARC records (those that go in the library’s online catalog) come and the varying quality of those records.

In May, Ginanni will be part of a three-person panel presentation titled “Yer Doin’ It Wrong: How Not to Interact with Vendors, Publishers or Librarians.” This will be at the annual North American Serials Interest Group conference in Fort Worth, Tex. Ginanni and representatives from Alexander Street Press and the Greater Western Library Alliance will offer tips based on their experiences working both in libraries and with publishers or library vendors.

Peter Johnson, head of Access Services, is serving as co-director of the College and Universities section of the North Carolina Library Association. He attended the NCLA Biennial Conference in Winston-Salem in October and the Access Services Conference in Atlanta, Ga., in November 2013.

Dana Sally, dean of Library Services, presented “The Fundamentals of Library Master Planning” as part of a professional panel at the 2013 Southeastern Library Association/South Carolina Library Association (SELA/SCLA) Joint Conference in Greenville, S.C., on November 13, 2013.

Mark Stoffan, head of Digital, Access and Technology Services, received a professional development grant to attend the annual forum of the Libraries and Information Technology Association held November 7-9, 2013, in Louisville, Ky. Stoffan also gave a luncheon presentation on open access issues for faculty members on October 24, 2013.

Carstens Named Associate Dean of Library Services

Timothy Carstens, long-time member of the Hunter Library faculty, is the new associate dean of library services.

A native of East Brunswick, N.J., Carstens came to WCU in 1990 to serve as head of cataloging at the library. He was promoted in 1996 to head of cataloging and acquisitions, a position he held for six years. In 2010 Carstens was named head of the library’s Content Organization and Management department. Recently, he and his staff have played key roles in structuring and implementing the electronic theses and dissertations program, the development of unique digital collections, and the acquisition of core intellectual content in digital formats.

Before coming to WCU, Carstens served as assistant catalog librarian at the D.H. Hill Library of N.C. State University. He earned his bachelor’s degree at Colby College and master of library science degree at Rutgers University. He has published widely in professional journals, including “Library Resources and Technical Services,” “College and Research Libraries,” and “Technical Services Quarterly.”

He has served on several committees of the Western North Carolina Library Network, including secretary, vice chair and chair of the Technical Services Committee. He has been a member of the American Library Association since 1983 and has served on a number of committees within that organization.
Reference Librarian Becky Kornegay Retires after 30 Years

Becky Kornegay has spent much of her life in libraries. As a child, Kornegay's mother often took her to the East Branch Library in Charlotte, where she climbed up in the kid-friendly chairs to enjoy books. High school found her working part-time in a one-room public library in Landis. In graduate school, she worked in the library of the Environmental Protection Agency in Research Triangle Park.

After earning her master's in library science at the University of North Carolina, Kornegay worked in UNC's House Undergraduate Library and in the North Carolina Collection. She came to Hunter Library in 1984 and stayed with the job for 30 years. When she retired in December 2013, she was the reference librarian with the longest history at Hunter.

In three decades at the library, Kornegay helped build a vast reference collection that she knows backwards and forwards and used her expertise to find the most helpful books and databases for students and faculty. Working with different academic disciplines made her job interesting, she said. "In many large universities, you have separate libraries devoted to a single discipline, such as law or medicine, so it's tempting to refer hard questions to them. But WCU has one library, so our reference librarians become expert searchers who can handle questions related to every discipline imaginable," she said. “That's one reason I enjoyed working here for so long. It has been a chance for constant learning.”

As the digital age came to the library and more information became available online, Kornegay embraced the new technologies, including social media, helping students learn to navigate the Internet. She authored a book about online searching with Hunter colleagues Hiddy Morgan and Heidi Buchanan. Magic Search: Getting the Best Results from Your Catalog and Beyond, released in 2009 by the ALA Editions won many positive reviews.

Kornegay credits the late Ed Cohen, the well-liked and widely admired head of Hunter's reference department who hired her, with setting the high professional standards still followed in the Research and Instruction Services Department. The enduring philosophy is to make sure that everyone doing research, whether students, faculty, staff, or community members, gets the very best information for the task at hand. Kornegay, who was herself head of reference for ten years, always encouraged new librarians to learn all the sources Hunter Library offers, whether old or new, print or online.

Since she retired in December 2013, Kornegay says she loves her free time, but misses the contact with students, faculty and staff members. “I enjoyed having a job that brought me to a university campus every day,” she said. “I miss helping people who are doing research, but there will always be someone else at Hunter who can. We’ve got a great library at WCU.”

The New Librarian, mid-1980s.

On the Go and Need to Know?

Check out the mobile website for library users on the go. Renew a book, start your research or contact a librarian from your mobile device. You will find links for library hours, the library catalog and more: http://www.wcu.edu/library/m/