
Text

Water: A Cross-Disciplinary Exhibit Exploring the
Significance, Power & Play of Life's Critical
Resource

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Libraries play pivotal role in our communities

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Libraries play pivotal role in our communities

By Karen Diaz
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Libraries enjoy an interesting relationship with the public and our users. We are trusted, loved, and yet often underestimated. Folks think of libraries as the friendly place to get books. They are indeed that – but so much more. Libraries are neutral in the sense of belonging to the collective, and hosting different points of view. They are political in the sense of dedication to that cause and working against censorship. They are for the common good. They are places and they are virtual. And importantly they are run by professionals who are guides, teachers, partners, community workers and scholars all in one. A public library is a space where the local community can come to grow and to learn about societal as well as personal matters whether that be through books or events. An academic library is a “neutral” space that brings different disciplines together through collections, space and services.

Libraries have a lot in common – and yet are distinct from – organizations like art galleries and museums. In fact, the GLAM acronym is meant to represent the overlapping concerns of galleries, libraries, archives and museums. And when libraries think of themselves as GLAM organizations, interesting things begin to happen. Libraries become more creative and visual. They become not only holders of stories and research, but tellers of stories and research.

West Virginia University Libraries does this in many ways. Our West Virginia and Regional History Center is the premier collection of primary materials for the state and region and holds treasures that tell stories of our past. Exhibits are open for the public to glimpse highlights of the collection. The digital collections allow anyone to view documents, videos and photographs in the collection from anywhere.

This coming fall, the WVU Downtown Campus Library is pleased to open a highly interdisciplinary, strikingly visual and deeply significant exhibit on WATER. This exhibit includes over 20 collaborators from on and off our campus. As an essential source of life, adventure, and even devastation, water is a significant resource in the state of West Virginia. By bringing academic research from many disciplines together with community activism and artistic expression on water all together in one venue we are creating a truly unique opportunity for anyone in the state to come and “take it all in.” We hope this will spark new opportunities for research, innovation and collaboration.

Additionally, we are working on a Public Arts Guide with the Art Museum of WVU, College of Creative Arts, Arts Monongahela and the Morgantown Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, for the city of Morgantown to provide citizens and visitors the opportunity to learn what art venues and opportunities exist in our community both on and off campus. You’ll find that some of these venues are in libraries! This work is funded in part by a community engagement grant from WVU.

WVU President E. Gordon Gee always reminds the campus that we have a mission to engage with and seek solutions to the many challenges of our state and region. Libraries can play an important role in being a crossroad, conduit and venue for such engagement. Expect it.