At the Heart of Campus Life:

The Kennedy Library

It's not your grandfather's library . . .

Yes, there are still books, newspapers and journals. Students still cram into the night at carrels or in study rooms. Library staff still patiently answer endless questions at the Reference desk.

But the card catalog has been auctioned off as a relic. You can now read an article on reserve in your pajamas by logging onto PolyCat, the online catalog, from your home computer and printing the full text for tomorrow's class discussion. You can take a class in geographic information systems from a librarian. And you can buy snacks and soft drinks and carry on a conversation in the Reading Room, which has a noise level to match that of Grand Central Station at rush hour.

When novelist Shelby Foote wrote, "A university is just a group of buildings gathered around a library," he was referring to the importance of libraries to the academic experience. The Kennedy Library at Cal Poly defines the life of the campus. Supported by librarians and staff—the gatekeepers of online databases, networked systems, and recent and musty journals—students flock to
the library in person and online. Whether in its virtual or physical incarnation, the library is more than its collections. It is, as Norman Cousins observed, "the delivery room for the birth of ideas."

In this age of information, when the sheer volume of new data produced in traditional and electronic formats on an annual basis has reached staggering proportions, the Kennedy Library at Cal Poly offers students and faculty a 21st-century approach to teaching and learning. Dean of Library Services Hiram Davis notes, "The infusion of electronic information is establishing a new working paradigm for the library: one of networked information, collaborative teaching with faculty, electronic access, and storage and partnership with other campus information providers."

As Cal Poly shifts to a digital learning environment, Kennedy Library faculty and staff are assuming new roles. With their expertise in search strategies, highly specialized resources and digital media, they are positioning the library as an indispensable campus resource.

Rob Laacke of the library's Multimedia division worked with Sociology Professor Maliha Zulfacar to create a video of her films of life in Afghanistan after the Taliban. "Library Multimedia is here to help faculty translate their ideas and raw materials into sophisticated finished products to use in the classroom," says Laacke. "Working with Professor Zulfacar was a great experience. She was open to new ideas on how to better communicate with her students through her video, and I learned more about Afghanistan than I ever thought possible."

Determined to give his students more in-depth exposure to research tools, Marketing Professor Brian Tietje sought help from Frank Vuotto, a Kennedy Library business librarian. "Frank showed us some search strategies that greatly improve our search efficiency. More importantly, my expectations for the students and their expectations of themselves have risen. Frank's contribution has definitely raised the bar of my standards for research," notes Tietje.

And when English major Ashlee Steward needed data for her senior
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project, "Gender Stereotypes in Contemporary Advertising," she searched the Datagenie database to tap into the Kennedy Library's subscriptions to online scholarly journals and article databases. Steward found more than 20 relevant articles, which she was able to read online, download or request by using an online form. Acquiring texts from other libraries proved to be an easy process through Interlibrary Loan. The library's late hours and 24-hour online services enabled her to complete much of her library research between classes and work, on campus and from home. "The library worked around my schedule, rather than the other way around. Without the Kennedy Library, I couldn't have completed my senior project and still have stayed sane," Steward says.

Contrary to popular belief, libraries are not like utilities: Information resources do not appear at the flick of a switch. The cost to maintain the diverse collections at the heart of the Cal Poly community's teaching and learning, including the technological infrastructure, online databases and other print and digital materials, is beyond the reach of any state university's budget. As the shelf life of information grows shorter, more creative solutions are needed to enable the Kennedy Library to support the research and instructional needs of its faculty and students. Shared collections and consortium subscription discounts are just two approaches to solving the problem.

At Cal Poly, students, faculty and industry have begun to invest in the future of library resources in their fields. For the past two years, students in the College of Agriculture's Agribusiness Department voted to provide the Kennedy Library with $35,000 from a student fee increase to expand and strengthen agribusiness research materials. "The resources of the library are an integral part of our
education efforts," says Agribusiness Professor Ken Scott. "The impact on teaching and learning will be substantial," adds librarian Frank Vuotto. "Students will gain hands-on experiences with real-world business tools, making them more desirable in today's workplace. Faculty members will have access to world-class business databases to support their research."

College of Liberal Arts Associate Dean Susan Currier and her husband, Chemistry and Biochemistry Professor Max Wills, created a gift annuity that will fund the Humanities Collections in the Kennedy Library.

"I'm a humanist and texts in all their various forms are central to the humanistic disciplines," says Currier. "Libraries not only store texts (many of which are now available online), they also organize knowledge and, to a certain extent, access to it. Technology will continue to affect the evolution of libraries, but in my vision of the future, public and university libraries will remain vital centers of and for learning."

Local industries also recognize the importance of preserving the history of the region and supporting future studies. Women for WineSense established a library fund to support the growing interest in viticulture studies at Cal Poly and the needs of the local wine industry. (See story in "Advancement News.")

Collecting the family papers of ranchers, environmentalists and vintners in the Ranching and Land Management Archives in Special Collections, and identifying support to preserve and manage those collections, are intrinsic to the mission of the Kennedy Library.

To provide faculty, alumni and friends of Cal Poly with the opportunity to provide library resources in an area of their interest and of Cal Poly's curriculum, the Kennedy Library has created individual Subject Area Endowments. For a tax-deductible gift of $10,000, payable over five years, individuals may create a fund to endow a specific subject area. All books and materials purchased with the income from the endowment will have a bookplate individually designed for the donor. Currier's bookplate, designed together with Cal Poly senior Holly Sell, a library Multimedia student assistant, will honor Currier and her husband through the resources purchased with their gift.

For more information on Subject Area Endowments, or other opportunities to support library resources for the campus, contact Carol Pendergast, library advancement director, at 805/756-5786.

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— Susan Currier