Slide image description: The slide background is a photograph of books on a crowded library shelf in black and white. Slide text: "Sites Lacking Sight: Architectural Imperialism in Library Design." Presented by Ashley Hosbach, Education Librarian, University of Virginia. Email: ahosbach@virginia.edu

Presented at ARLIS/NA 47th Annual Conference March 2019 as part of the "In Process: Subverting and Dismantling Institutional Hegemony in Libraries" roundtable.

Slide image description: White background with logo for the ARLIS/NA 47th Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. March 26-30, 2019. The conference theme was Arts: In/Site (Insight, Incite, In sight). A graphic inspired by Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty sits next to the logo text.

The views expressed in this presentation are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer or of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Slide image description: No images, just text on a white background.

Picture an academic library.

- What does the space communicate?

- Is there a power narrative?

Slide image description: No images, just text on a white background.

Notes: I opened the session by posing these questions to the audience. Picture an academic library: what does the space communicate? Is there a power narrative? I asked them to shout out words/phrases that come to mind. The audience responded with: "intimidating", "imposing", "powerful", "knowledge", "superiority", "intelligence", "history", "memory", "nostalgia", etc.
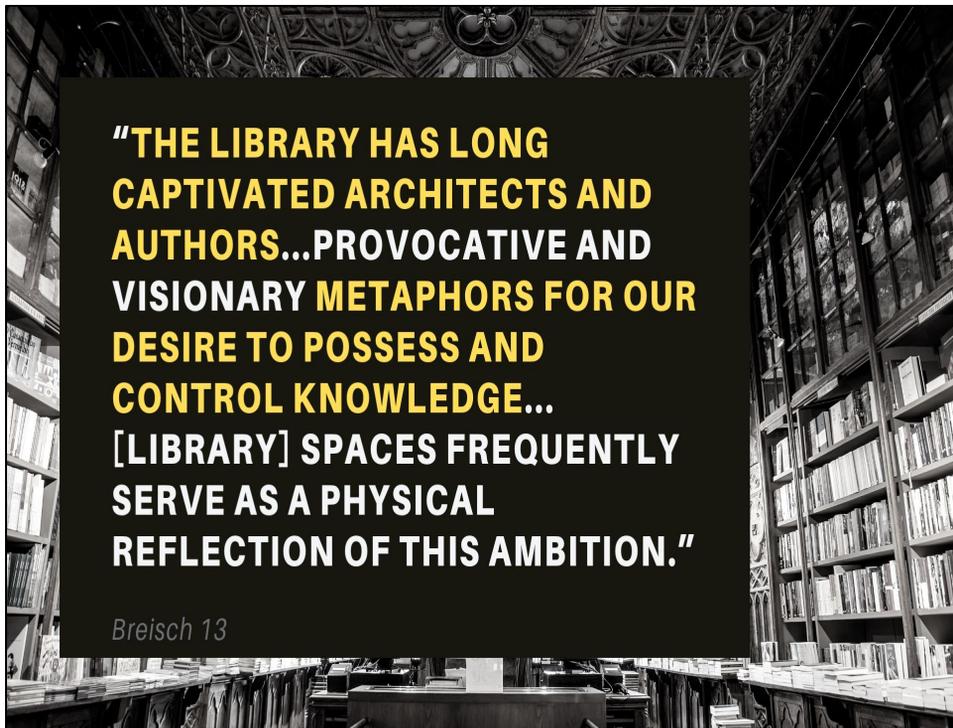
Slide image description: Slide background is a photograph of a library reading room in black and white. Slide text: A quote from Kenneth Breisch, "The Library has long captivated architects and authors…provocative and visionary metaphors for our desire to possess and control knowledge…[Library] spaces frequently serve as a physical reflection of this ambition" (Breisch 13).

Notes: In my literature review, scholars discuss library architecture across the board as COLLECTIONS based in design and not SERVICES based. The built environment emphasizes the sheer volume and might of the physical collection to convey power through knowledge. I love this quote from Kenneth Breisch's book, *American Libraries, 1730-1950,* because it hammers home the point that the dominant design for libraries centers on physically demonstrating control and possession of knowledge. Nothing about conveying openness. Nothing about the core welcoming services that we strive to provide.

These academic library designs serve as monuments to the "higher education experience". But, what is the "higher education experience" really? Viewing the library as "monument" is problematic. Library architecture contributes to the notion of higher education as exclusionary, the ivory tower, removed from the community, and representative of elitism before you even walk through the library's front doors.

"Libraries as gatekeepers"
Physical representation of hoarding knowledge

Slide Image Description: A GIF of Smaug the dragon from The Lord of the Rings emerging from his hoard of treasure with an evil grin.

Notes: When viewed through a critical librarianship lens this is problematic! You may say over the years we've moved away from the standard librarians/libraries as "gatekeepers". We've created less intimidating reference desks/gotten rid of them all together. We're removing barriers, etc. I would say we're seeing an increase in divorcing librarians from our physical spaces (relocating offices to lower levels, away from high traffic areas, removing service points). If a librarian isn't communicating from the get-go, what is the architecture/design communicating in our place? When a campus discusses library renovations/the presence of the library they talk about the physical presence of collections not librarians. Our exterior and interior designs encourage this line of thought.

Slide image description: Gray background with an icon of an open book. Slide text: On the left side of the slide, "Academic libraries are designed to promote their university's status." On the right side of the slide, a quote from Hannah Bennett, "Is there an architectural code to the research process?"

Notes: Hannah Bennett (from ARLIS's very own Art Documentation) raises a great question! In her article, she explores this lens of architectural code in more of a creative approach. But, I would like to raise this question to another level and say YES there is an "architectural code to the research process" and that code tends to be determined by university board members, stakeholders, administration (white, male coding what scholarship should look like as a physical representation, i.e. narrow view of scholarship transformed from flesh to stone). These designs are made to promote/cement their university's status as part of the elite package/a selling point on campus tours.

Church vs. Library
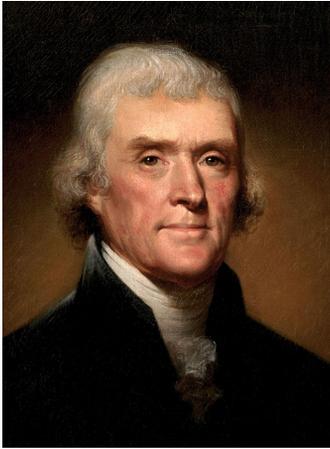
Created by Rob Crosswell, The Noun Project

Slide image description: On the left a portrait of Thomas Jefferson. On the right an icon of a building outline with a book in the center.

Notes: How did we get to the library as the "campus center"? Let's trace the history of university library architecture. A face we are very familiar with at the University of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson posed a radical design for the time that the LIBRARY not the CHURCH should be the architectural center of the university. Despite this, did we ever truly take religion/church out of the equation from library design? Was there a removal of a monument from the campus center? Or did it simply take another form?
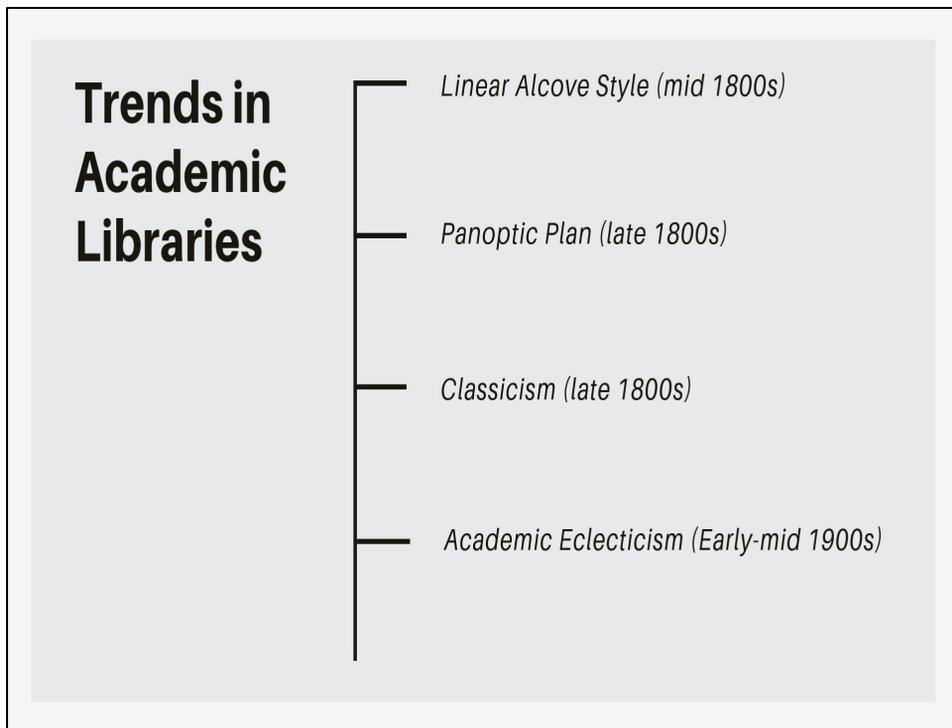
Slide image description: No images. Gray background with text on a timeline. Text: Trends in Academic Libraries. Linear Alcove Style (mid 1800s), Panoptic Plan (late 1800s), Classicism (late 1800s), Academic Eclecticism (early-mid 1900s).

Notes: The church may no longer be a focal point. However, architectural trends in academic libraries over the past 200 years have borrowed from churches/temples/places of worship. Is the influence really gone? Are the implications gone? Secular v.s. sacred spaces?

Slide image description: Photograph of The University of Washington Library's Suzallo Reading Room. Slide text: Top "Beautiful Libraries" Lists. Travel and Leisure: The Most Beautiful College Libraries in America. Architectural Digest: 15 Stunning University Libraries Around the World You Need to See.

Notes: You may say, that's not true anymore. We don't value that type of architecture anymore. FALSE, we do! Take a look at lists across pop culture with Travel+Leisure, Buzzfeed, Architectural Digest, etc. We ascribe value to these designs and view them as more "sophisticated" , more "scholarly" than others on a university level. Why? I'd be willing to say that there are those of us in this room guilty of sharing these top library lists amongst our colleagues + friends.
Incredibly ironic given that the church wanted to restrict access to knowledge and literacy! Why are our designs based on creating a sense of the sacred?
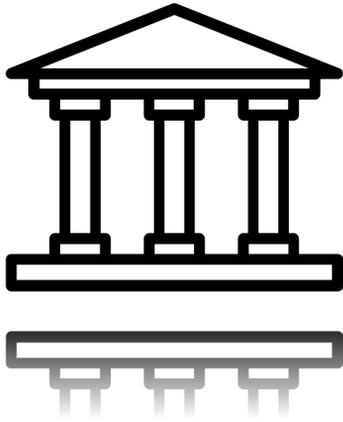
Slide image description: Photograph of the entrance to the Charles L. Brown Science and Engineering Library at the University of Virginia.

Notes: An example from UVA. Jeffersonian architecture = plantation architecture. We can't forget this. A prime example of libraries as part of the tour/selling the "higher education experience". We parade prospective students/parents past our libraries as monuments to the "college experience". Are librarians included on these tours? No. Accessibility highlighted? No. Support? No. Entrances are intimidating. How does this affect students?

Slide image description: Photograph of students walking through the main entrance of the Brown Science and Engineering Library. This room/hallway is called "The Mural Room." It features almost floor to ceiling murals of nude figures from Greek mythology.

Notes: How do students see themselves in our spaces? 1st gen. students, historically marginalized groups, etc. Artwork in libraries should be considered. Entrances are paramount in communication. They set the tone!

- Euro-centric
- Monuments/temples
- Playing a role in institutional propaganda
- Who are we excluding in this narrative?

Created by Ryan Choi,
The Noun Project

Notes: Wrap-up. Euro-centric designs were created in order to establish "legitimacy" and power on American Higher Ed campuses to compare to their European counterparts. Library architecture DOES play a role in institutional propaganda. It's time to recognize this. What does your design communicate? Are librarians allowed a voice in creating this narrative? Do librarians contribute/feed into this?

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