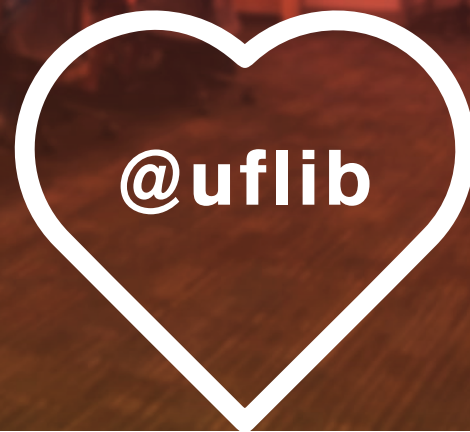




BRINGING VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY TO THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY

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At a time when library spaces and services are constantly evolving, it can be difficult to truly understand our users and how best to reach them. Are students viewing their library experiences positively? Is there a gap between what we think they want and what they actually want? As the Journalism and Mass Communications Librarian for the George A. Smathers Libraries, I spend a lot of time helping advertising and public relations students research their target audiences for optimal engagement.



In late 2017, a serendipitous moment made me realize we had a major opportunity to do the same with our own patrons.



**‘Gone are the days
of the library as an
oppressive third space.’**

Free pizza at library west.... Loving study
nights even more!!

3

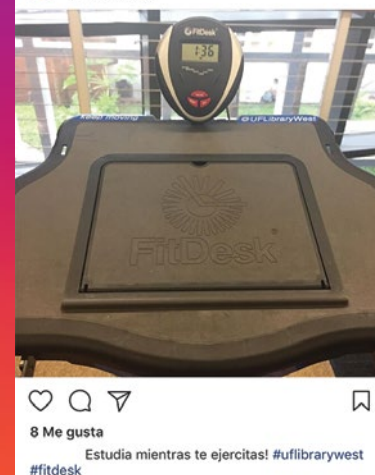
While exploring the social media platform Instagram, I stumbled across a photo that had been posted by a student studying in our main humanities and social sciences branch—Library West. In the image, a pair of sneakers were propped up on a window sill overlooking the Plaza of the Americas as light streamed into the building. Underneath the photo was the caption “The library is my home” followed by the hashtags #uf #reading #librarywest. Since a hashtag links together all content described with the same keyword(s), I immediately clicked on #librarywest. What I found was a collection of more than 500 student-generated photos that were taken in

(or related to) our library. Several students had also claimed Library West as their location while posting to Instagram, which linked to even more relevant photos.

That day I discovered a treasure trove of unmediated data that could play a key role in helping us better understand how students view and use our library spaces and resources. Searches across other social media platforms such as Snapchat yielded similar results, and I also found images for other UF library branches such as the Marston Science Library. Yet the question remained—what were we supposed to do with all these photos? What is the best way to collect, organize and analyze visual content?



“The library is my home.”



Enter Hannah Toombs, a UF anthropology graduate student who specializes in visual anthropology. In yet another chance moment, Hannah asked our European Studies Librarian, Hélène Huet, if there were any digital humanities opportunities available within our graduate student internship program. Hélène was familiar with, and supportive of, the project idea, and told Hannah that in fact we had access to hundreds of student photos we were hoping to analyze. She knew that having someone who is an expert on using photographs to better understand communities would be the perfect person to take this project to the next level. We submitted an application to fund a visual anthropology intern who could help us develop and execute our plan—which was thankfully awarded by the Libraries' Internship Program Committee.

The Smathers Graduate Student Internship Program provides semester-based internships for graduate students in the UF Libraries in conjunction with academic units. Interns are paid a living wage of \$15 an hour, and the experience is meant to complement the student's academic career while also providing for their professional

development. Students are not necessarily interested in becoming librarians, but their skills can match library needs while giving them valuable opportunities to put research into practice within their own disciplines.

Over the Summer 2018 semester, with Hélène and I serving as co-intern supervisors, Hannah collected (via screen capture) five years' worth of social media data posted by UF students using library hashtags or location tags. The images were then uploaded to a shared drive and categorized and labeled based on common trends and themes. Additionally, Hannah organized a focus group with students to record their reactions to content posted by their peers. She retrieved photos from four different social media platforms, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook, with Instagram by far producing the most content with over 1,500 photographs pulled from that site alone.

Hannah divided the collected photographs into 20 categories, revealing themes such as library landscapes and architecture, study spaces, selfies, graduation/nostalgia, and humor. One of the largest and most surprising categories that emerged was “wishing to be somewhere else.” In these



112 Me gusta
I'd Prefer Laying On A Beach With This View 🌴



12 Me gusta
So close to finishing this. So. Much. Material. But loving everything I'm learning. Nasm cpt license come to meeee 📖 #licensingexam #cot #studynight #librarlife #latenight



5 Me gusta
That moment when you find a forgotten book so rare that it exists only in few microfilm copies in all the world.

Wishing to be Somewhere Else

Landscape & Architecture

Library Resources

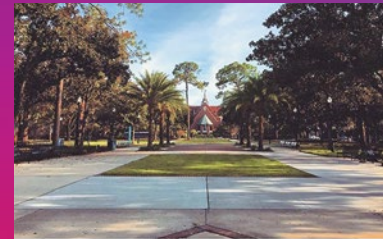
Study Spaces

Nostalgia

Food



1 Me gusta
It's 5 AM at SwampHacks.



72 Me gusta
I'm a Marston babe, but Lib West be serving looks™
i feel this caption on a spiritual level lol

photos, students have a UF Library listed as their location, yet are posting glamorous vacation shots of all sorts of places, from tropical islands to scenic mountain views. Captions revealed that undergrads use these photos to help them through especially stressful times of the semester, as they fantasize about previous Spring Break trips or use summer plans to motivate them through finals. While they are physically studying in the library, their minds are often somewhere else.

Results from the student focus group showed that UF students truly view their library experiences as an essential component of college life – gone are the days of the library as an oppressive third space. For one participant, “Library West is my first home. I spend more time here than my apartment.” This sense of “home” helps us understand why many UF library spaces have become increasingly more social as students come not only for quiet study, but also for a place to collaborate, meetup, and be seen. Students also explained that posting humorous images and memes about the Libraries help them cope with academic pressures while allowing them to feel more connected to each other.

“It’s relatable...I guess it makes the struggle of what you’re doing easier...if you make a joke it alleviates some of the stress,” said another attendee.

Looking to the future, Hannah’s summer internship was just the beginning. After analyzing the many categories of photos and the focus group transcript, the three of us have identified so many potential marketing strategies. For example, students told us they want more branded library merchandise, which prompted us to give out orange and blue coffee mugs with “Up All Night at Library West” engraved on them. These mugs have become one of our most popular promotional items with students. Hannah, Hélène, and I have presented about the project at national anthropology and library conferences, and are currently working on a scholarly article summarizing our findings. Finally, we are interested in developing a physical or virtual photo exhibit showcasing some of the amazing images that were taken in or of our spaces. The further we dive in, the more we realize that the Smathers Libraries Visual Anthropology Project has become the gift that keeps on giving. 