

News and Events

THE SOUL OF OUR SCHOOL | By Thomas Hassan, Acting Principal

To add a library to a house is to give that house a soul. – Cicero

Let me take some liberty with Cicero and offer, “To add a library to a school is to give that school a soul.” This issue of the *Bulletin* celebrates the Academy’s library as it reaches a 100-year milestone: the hiring, during the 1905–06 school year, of the Academy’s first librarian. The current library building, completed in 1971, is the largest secondary school library in the world—both in size and in resources. It has been lauded as an architectural marvel, and was recently depicted on a set of U.S. Postal Service stamps entitled *Masterworks of Modern American Architecture*.

None of these facts address the real worth of the Class of 1945 Library, though, or the nature of what goes on inside the building each day. It’s the interaction between students and librarians that defines the real soul of our magnificent library.

Preps first experience the library and its librarians as part of Junior Studies, an interdisciplinary course taken in the fall term of their first year. I have had the good fortune to be a teacher in that program, and many of my fondest memories are of our youngest students coming to know the library and its librarians. I have watched the dedicated library staff patiently introduce the preps to the intricacies of the Academy’s online card catalogue, *Biblion*; explain how to harness the library’s resources to research a topic; and show them treasures from our extensive archives.

Ultimately, Junior Studies is an introduction to learning at Exeter. It is required of all preps and staffed by teachers across the disciplines who work to develop the skills of creative thinking and independent learning through classroom discussion. Generally course assignments include observing, listening, drawing, researching, speaking and writing—skills of study in both the sciences and the humanities. This course also serves as an introduction to the library as a research facility for written and oral presentations.

In recent years the Junior Studies curriculum has included short stories, poems, dramas and essays that focus on individuals who have made choices that have stood against the prevailing voices of their times. Each student picked such a figure to research in the context of their introduction to the library. This year the format changed a bit, and students were asked to use the library and documents from the archives to examine diversity and its meaning over the years. Cartoons from the early 20th century, past issues of the *Bulletin*, the *Exonian* and *PEAN* were cited, as well as long-out-of-print publications like *The Phillips Exeter Literary Monthly*, which was founded in 1886.

As the students delved into back copies of magazines, newspapers and books, they were guided and encouraged by the librarians each step of the way. Exeter students appreciate the time and effort put forth in their behalf. A few years ago, the students in my Junior Studies class were so grateful to Jacquelyn Thomas, the Academy Librarian and James H. Ottaway Jr. ’55 Professor, that they made and signed a card expressing their appreciation for her help throughout the term.

As this year’s prep class completed their Junior Studies course, the library was the venue for a wonderful closing ceremony, complete with reflections delivered by two four-year seniors. As I listened to these students share their words of wisdom, it seemed only fitting that they did so in this grand space. Our library is, both figuratively and literally, the soul of our school.



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BRIAN CROWLEY