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Amy Dinh

COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS STUDENT



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Camosun IN OUR Community



At Camosun, the library INNOVATES and INSPIRES

By Ivan Watson

Sybil Harrison has been immersed in books and libraries her whole life. "I was one of those kids," she says enthusiastically. "I could read before I could tell the time or tie my shoes."

After earning a Master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of British Columbia, Harrison built a successful career in public libraries and joined Camosun College in 2008. As Camosun's Director of Learning Services, she oversees a comprehensive portfolio of resources that helps to make the college experience supportive, educational and fun.

These resources include two main library facilities (one on each campus), Writing Centre, Disability Resource Centre, and Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). Collectively, these resources embody an overall vision of a supportive student experience that fosters success and prioritizes a holistic approach to learning.

A librarian at heart, Harrison is a strong advocate for the key role that libraries play in communities. "Libraries connect individuals," she notes. "I often say: 'IT' seems to be the new thing, but we've been in information technology since Gutenberg."

While Camosun's Library collection is smaller than those at large research institutions, Harrison is proud of how Camosun has grown areas of core strength. "In some ways it's a more focussed collection and there are areas where we have really



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books by Canadian
authors to celebrate
Canada150

Camosun Library's Summer Reading List

- Revenge of the Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter by David Sax
- Gutenberg's Fingerprint: A Book Lover Bridges the Digital Divide by Marilyn Simonds
- The Lonely Hearts Hotel by Heather O'Neill
- Son of a Trickster by Eden Robinson
- Who Needs Books? : Reading in the Digital Age by Lynne Coody

great strengths such as in the area of Indigenous Peoples as well as areas like nursing," she says. "This reflects the programming that we do and is responsive to the learning needs of our students."

The collection even includes unique items that may surprise people. "One thing that we're doing differently from other institutions is that we've started to collect things" she say. "For example, we've been responding to our student needs by building this amazing collection of model bones and brains so that our anatomy students can engage with these models."

Other resources include the ability for students to sign out noise canceling headphones and laptops to aid their studies. Early learning and child-care students can borrow specialized kits with everything required to facilitate story time sessions with children.

This approach is part of an overall vision that sees libraries as open, accessible and welcoming spaces for learning and reflection. "If you work in libraries, you tend to think without boundaries," says Harrison. "Outstanding libraries focus on community. I think fundamentally that is my philosophy-building community is about making connections between people and resources and ideas."

Camosun's library focusses on student success but is open to the public as well. "We offer a community borrower's card," notes Harrison. "Anyone can come in, show some identification and get a card that allows them to borrow up to five items at a time. It means that our library has really become part of the neighbourhood."

As part of Camosun's commitment to community, the library has served as a public space for charities and non-profit groups like the United Way and Victoria Writer's Festival and for events including the Camosun College employee awards. "I think it is a reflection of Camosun's strong commitment to access," says Harrison. "The library's openness is a reflection of Camosun values and principles and that's something that has been long established at the college."

When students need a little extra help and aren't necessarily comfortable speaking to their instructors, Camosun Learning Services offers a variety of resources to lend a hand. At the Writing Centre, students can book an appointment online and meet with experienced instructional assistants for one on one sessions. The Student Success Centre helps students develop a variety of life skills including study techniques, managing stress, and dealing with test anxiety. The Disability Resource Centre can work through individualized accommodations and help break down barriers to academic success. "The message we want to get across to students is that we care and that we want them to succeed," says Harrison.

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Sybil Harrison

Camosun's Director of Learning Services

Camosun Library also offers online services such as "Ask Away" and "Write Away." The former is a province-wide service in collaboration with partner institutions where students can submit research questions using a chat function and the latter offers students the opportunity to submit papers online to be reviewed by writing tutors.

For faculty, CETL offers supports to instructors in several key areas: e-learning, educational technology, faculty development, and curriculum development and program review. "We help our instructors achieve teaching excellence and we also work with new instructors who have just arrived at Camosun. We're committed to having an outstanding learning experience for students and that means reviewing and evolving our curriculum and staying on top of the latest innovations in education."

As libraries evolve to meet the needs of the information age, Harrison believes that their values of openness, accessibility and commitment to fostering learning make them the ideal drivers of innovation and positive change. "People look at libraries and think of us as very traditional places, but at our core we are institutions that are very open to change. That's because we have a strong tradition and strong principles about what we're all about and that gives us the foundation to adapt to meet the future needs of our students and our community."

For more information, please visit: Camosun.ca/library

PHONE HOURS: M-F 9am-4pm | 250-370-3550 | 1-877-554-7555 (TOLL-FREE) | camosun.ca

