

THE POWER OF BOOKS: UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL TRANSITION FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The first prison library was established in 1844 at Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. In the decades following the 1930 publication of a prison libraries manual by the American Correctional Association, the number of prison libraries, particularly in federal prisons, increased dramatically. As this manual (p. 4) stated, for incarcerated individuals, "books are...a bridge to the free world." While many of these physical libraries still exist, the recent introduction of tablets into state and federal prisons has changed the landscape of prison libraries and books more specifically. This project, then, seeks to understand how this transition from physical libraries to digital libraries affects incarcerated individuals. Additionally, we aim to better understand potential access issues (i.e., time limits, cost, privacy, etc.) related to virtual libraries. Using interviews with prison librarians and currently incarcerated individuals, this project hopes to serve as a reinforcement of the importance of prison libraries as a cost-effective tool for rehabilitation; thus, potentially improving both the prison environment and post-release success of currently incarcerated individuals.

RESEARCH RESOURCES

Scan this QR code to view selected resources.



AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

- Current state of prison libraries
- Prison transition to tablets
- Changing information landscape in prisons
- 3rd party suppliers: questions of data security; privacy/monitoring; ownership/control/use of data collected; difficulties of accessing this information for researchers
- Cost and accessibility
- Perspectives of: incarcerated individuals; family members; librarians and educators
- Use for legal materials: opportunities and challenges surrounding access, timeliness, etc.
- Impact on recidivism and rehabilitation