

# Now More than Ever – Más Que Nunca

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I began my morning by checking my Facebook account, where I have a personal page as well as administering two institutional pages (the [USFSP Digital Archive page](#) and the [Nelson Poynter Memorial Library page](#)) The top posting on my personal page was from María-Jesús del Olmo, the Directora del Centro de Recursos Informativos with the U.S. Embassy in Madrid. I got to know María-Jesús when I was speaking in Spain on open access, digital collections and institutional repositories several years ago. This morning (her afternoon) she wrote about [an article in \*El País\*](#) that describes how the people of Guadalajara, Spain rose up in support of their public library to fight against drastic cutbacks in government support.

There is no doubt that Spain is enduring a terrible economic crisis. A [September 28, 2012 \*New York Times\* article](#) noted that “In April 2012, Spain’s unemployment rate reached 24.4 percent, the highest in Europe and an especially stark figure given that the government had not yet begun to lay off public sector servants in any significant number.” In the face of this crisis, the Spanish government has instituted a series of austerity measures. One of many measures instituted in municipalities across Spain has been to reduce funding to libraries. The people of Guadalajara have said “enough” and have responded by paying out of their own pockets for library collections and by stepping up to provide volunteer labor, among other things. They have let their government know, as one of their supporters says, that libraries are needed more than ever when the economy is in such bad shape. “En un momento de crisis hay que invertir más que nunca en bibliotecas. La gente no tiene dinero para comprar libros pero sigue necesitando acceder a la cultura y a la información. O es que, además de echarnos del trabajo, ¿tampoco vamos a tener derecho a la cultura y a la información?” (my translation: *In a moment of crisis, it’s necessary to invest more than ever in libraries. People don’t have money to buy books, but they continue to need access to culture and information. Or is it the case that, in addition to losing our jobs, neither are we going to have the right to culture and information?*)

Why am I mentioning this? Because the same thing is happening to libraries across the United States, including Florida. Public libraries and academic libraries, like the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, have seen recurring reductions in their budgets for collections and for staffing, which means less access to information, shorter library hours, and less help from professional staff and librarians. The justification from our municipal, state, and federal governments is always the same: “We have to reduce costs, therefore we’re going to cut out non-essential services” –and they always include libraries in their definition of non-essential services. Yet, as the woman from Spain pointed out in the *El País* article, libraries are even more important to people when the economy is bad. Without taxpayers having access to libraries and the free information and assistance they provide, people will be unable to weather the economic storm. Far from being a drain on the economy, libraries provide a much needed economic boost to their local economies.

In May 2010, the Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development of the University of West Florida produced a report entitled [Taxpayer Return on Investment in Florida Public Libraries](#) where they documented that “Florida’s public libraries return \$8.32 for every \$1.00 invested from all sources.” The report also documented that:

- “For every \$3,491 spent on public libraries from public funding sources in Florida, one job (in the economy, not just in libraries) is created.
- For every dollar of public support spent on public libraries in Florida, Gross Regional Product (the value of all goods and services produced in the state) increases by \$10.57.
- For every dollar of public support spent on public libraries in Florida, income (wages) increases by \$22.97.”

Since economic return on investment is the name of the game today, we need to produce a similar study for academic libraries in the state. The Association of College & Research Libraries of the American Library Association has produced a [\*Value of Academic Libraries Toolkit\*](#). We in the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library routinely collect data to demonstrate our value to the institution, the students, and the people of Tampa Bay and we have been sharing it with the Regional Chancellor and the rest of the campus administration. We are pleased that Chancellor Hogarth has paid attention to our data and has done what he could to stop the hemorrhaging in funding for library collections and staffing, in spite of the reduced state funding to USFSP as a whole. There is still much to be done and we will be turning to our users in the coming months to help us collect and present our data.

In the meantime, if you are so inclined, we are always happy to receive your financial support. Visit us here <http://www.nelson.usf.edu/npml/give.html> to see how you can help.