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## Survey and Implications of Alumni Services in American Academic Libraries: Postprint

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### Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Through investigation and in-depth analysis of alumni services at 30 US university libraries, this study summarizes the implications for China. [Method/Process] Employing web-based surveys, email surveys, and inductive methods, the alumni services of the selected 30 university libraries are examined in depth across six dimensions: alumni column establishment, document circulation services, electronic resource services, reference consultation services, space services, and other services. [Results/Conclusion] Chinese university libraries can derive the following insights: thoroughly implement the philosophy of alumni services, refine alumni service systems, establish dedicated alumni service columns, expand the breadth and depth of alumni services, and develop services in collaboration with alumni associations.

### Full Text

## Survey and Enlightenment of Alumni Services in American Academic Libraries

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**Abstract:** [Purpose/Significance] Through investigating and analyzing the alumni services of 30 American academic libraries, this study summarizes the implications for China. [Method/Process] Using web-based investigation, email surveys, and inductive analysis, this paper examines the selected 30 university libraries across six dimensions: alumni column setup, document lending services, electronic resource services, reference consultation services, space services, and other services. [Result/Conclusion] Chinese academic libraries can draw the following insights: thoroughly implement the concept of alumni services, improve alumni service systems, establish dedicated alumni service columns, expand the breadth and depth of alumni services, and collaborate with alumni associations in service delivery.

**Keywords:** alumni; alumni services; academic libraries; United States

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American academic libraries have a long history, relatively mature management systems, and high degrees of openness. To better serve community readers, the American Library Association (ALA) issued relevant guiding principles in 2005, stating that university libraries should serve community readers like their own faculty and students, meeting their information needs to achieve full integration between academic libraries and society at large [1]. When providing services to external readers, American academic libraries explicitly categorize alumni as a type of off-campus reader, demonstrating their emphasis on alumni services.

University libraries possess significant advantages in information resources, professional expertise, and technical means when opening services to alumni. However, Chinese academic libraries have traditionally provided limited services to alumni, restricting their user base to current faculty, staff, and students, which represents considerable limitations. Although some Chinese university libraries have begun to open services to alumni, the scope and extent remain narrow. Moreover, no unified standards have been established regarding how libraries should serve alumni, how service scope should be determined, or how alumni resources should be managed. In contrast, alumni services in American academic libraries are relatively mature, offering rich experiences worthy of study.

## 2. Research Status

Chinese scholars' research on this topic has primarily focused on two areas: specific content of alumni services in American academic libraries and strategies for implementing alumni services in Chinese libraries.

Regarding specific content studies, Li Jinfang et al. investigated eight American university libraries that have developed distinctive alumni services, covering in-library reading, material borrowing, service facilities, licensed electronic resources (on-campus use/remote access), interlibrary loan/document delivery, and wireless networks [2]. Feng Wenmin expanded the research scope to 20

American university libraries, examining valid identification documents, service fees, service regulations (alumni card application and usage rules, borrowing rules, computer resource usage rules, electronic resource usage rules), extended user groups, and service content [3]. Among case studies of individual libraries, Cornell University appears most frequently. For instance, both Che Hui [4] and Wu Lina [5] examined Cornell's specific alumni service offerings.

Regarding service strategies, Zhou Meihua suggested that Chinese academic libraries should institutionalize alumni services and progressively expand offerings—starting with document lending, then opening electronic reading rooms and purchasing alumni database versions, and finally providing deep-level information services—while emphasizing alumni donations [6]. Che Hui, considering the Chinese context, proposed insights on implementing systematic management, prioritizing electronic resource services, accelerating digitization of special collections, and gradually developing diversified information services [7]. Hao Chaojun et al. offered specific recommendations: conceptually, developing resource-sharing awareness and proactively serving alumni and external readers; practically, actively promoting the importance of alumni services and converting recent graduates into alumni readers [8].

Building upon these rich research experiences and content, this study selects samples based on authoritative ranking criteria, expands the research scope, and deepens the analysis to provide insights for Chinese academic libraries.

### 3. Survey Sample and Methods

To ensure representativeness and comprehensiveness, this study selected libraries from the top 30 universities in the *U.S. News & World Report* 2017 comprehensive rankings (see ). The *U.S. News* rankings, based on global research reputation, regional research reputation, publication volume, normalized citation impact, and total citation counts, represent the most authoritative and influential ranking system in the United States. Using these rankings to select survey samples provides representative coverage of current alumni service development in American academic libraries.

Employing web-based investigation, this study examined the library homepages of these 30 universities, collecting all alumni service-related content. Additionally, due to incomplete website construction and insufficient alumni service information at some institutions, the researchers supplemented data through email surveys, form-based consultation, and real-time online reference services by contacting librarians for targeted inquiries.

### 4. Current Status of Alumni Services in American Academic Libraries

This investigation analyzes American academic library alumni services across six dimensions: alumni column setup, document lending services, electronic resource services, reference consultation services, space services, and other services.

**4.1 Alumni Column Setup on Library Homepages** Clear navigation is crucial for users to locate needed resources. Effective website navigation helps alumni quickly and accurately find relevant services, saving considerable time and effort. presents the navigation setup for alumni columns on American academic library websites.

Regarding navigation levels, fewer levels enable faster access to resources and services, while more levels increase the likelihood of users getting lost during searches. As shown in , over two-thirds of libraries limit alumni service content to within three levels, significantly facilitating alumni search and utilization of relevant resources and services.

In terms of column naming, the most important requirement is inclusion of the keyword “alumni” to clearly distinguish these services from those for other user groups. Additionally, alumni column names should be concise to maximize navigation efficiency. Among surveyed libraries, alumni column names primarily fall into six categories: “Alumni,” “Alumni Services,” “Alumni Information,” “Alumni Assistance,” “Alumni Resources,” and “I am an Alumnus,” all effectively summarizing their contents.

Regarding column content, alumni columns provide detailed introductions to relevant services and resources, generally including: document lending services (alumni borrowing privileges, borrowing rules, etc.); electronic resource services; reference consultation services; space services (printing, computer and Wi-Fi provision, etc.); alumni donations; and campus visit information (campus maps, driving directions, shuttle services, library locations, and opening hours).

**4.2 Document Lending Services** Document resources form the foundation of library services and permeate all service processes. Book borrowing represents a basic service offered by American academic libraries to alumni, who can visit libraries in person to obtain access and borrowing privileges through relevant departments.

**4.2.1 Valid Document Processing Access Card Processing:** Among the 30 surveyed libraries, 26 allow free alumni access. For example, at the University of Chicago, not only alumni but also their family members can access the library for free. Additionally, alumni may bring clients for short-term visits (1-2 days), with relatives and guests requiring accompaniment by the alumnus to obtain access cards from the Privileges Office. The remaining four libraries charge fees for access cards. For instance, Harvard alumni pay \$10 for one-year access privileges (renewable), which include borrowing rights but exclude interlibrary loan and remote electronic resource access.

**Borrowing Card Processing:** To obtain borrowing privileges, alumni must purchase borrowing cards. Due to relatively high costs associated with material circulation, most libraries charge for this service. Among the 30 libraries, 22 charge fees for alumni borrowing privileges, with rates varying by month,

quarter, or year (see ).

#### 4.2.2 Borrowing Permissions and Regulations **Borrowing Quantity:**

Borrowing limits vary by institution (see [Figure 1: see original paper]). Among surveyed libraries, four impose no limits. Among those with limits, Emory University allows the maximum of 200 items, while UCLA permits only five. Yale's borrowing limits vary by card type: standard cards allow 15 items, while premium cards allow 50.

**Borrowing Period:** Loan periods also vary (see [Figure 2: see original paper]). The longest period is at the University of Chicago (one quarter), followed by Yale (61 days) and MIT (60 days). Half of the libraries set a 28-day loan period. Brown University's period ranges from 4-8 weeks, with materials borrowed within one month due at the end of the following month.

**Renewals:** Renewal policies differ across institutions (see [Figure 3: see original paper]). MIT and UCLA alumni have no renewal rights. Caltech, Brown, and three other libraries allow renewals, but the number of renewals varies and depends on item status.

**Fines:** Regulations for overdue general and recalled materials, as well as lost items, vary by library (see ). Some libraries suspend borrowing privileges as a penalty, either when fines exceed a certain threshold (e.g., University of Chicago suspends privileges when alumni fines exceed \$50) or based on overdue duration (e.g., University of Michigan-Ann Arbor suspends privileges when general materials are overdue by more than 30 days or recalled items by one day).

**Interlibrary Loan:** Following Tsinghua University Library's classification, interlibrary loan services are divided into two types: returnable interlibrary borrowing and non-returnable document delivery. Yale, Johns Hopkins, Dartmouth, and other libraries provide interlibrary borrowing for alumni. For example, Yale allows alumni with borrowing privileges to participate in interlibrary loans with loan periods determined by the lending library (typically 3-4 weeks). Restricted materials and audiovisual items (e.g., DVDs) have shorter loan periods. Alumni may have up to five concurrent interlibrary loan requests with no quantity limits, but online renewal is not permitted, and materials may be recalled.

MIT, University of Pennsylvania, and other libraries provide document delivery services. MIT alumni can request document delivery in various electronic formats for journal articles, technical reports, and papers. For urgent needs, MIT offers expedited delivery payable by credit card.

**4.3 Electronic Resource Services** Electronic resource services constitute a primary form of alumni services. Alumni access electronic resources not only from university libraries but also from alumni associations or alumni offices. For example, Harvard alumni can access databases provided by the alumni association using their Harvard Alumni Association ID (HAAID). Some resources

are jointly provided by alumni associations and libraries, such as the “Hopkins Knowledge Net” online library created by Johns Hopkins’ alumni association and library.

Among the 30 surveyed libraries, most have opened electronic resource sharing rights to alumni, including self-built databases, purchased journal databases, institutional repositories, open-access journals, and web resource links. For example, UC Berkeley provides alumni with multiple resource types: 5 research resources, 4 online book databases, 5 online article databases, 5 digital libraries, 9 image and audio databases, and 2 dissertation databases.

Due to copyright and licensing restrictions, the University of Chicago, Yale, and eight other libraries do not permit remote access, allowing only on-site electronic resource access. Except for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (which denies alumni database access entirely), 19 libraries allow alumni remote access.

Twenty-three libraries list accessible databases alphabetically or by subject on their websites. Statistics on the number of databases available to alumni are shown in .

**4.4 Reference Consultation Services** American academic libraries offer diverse consultation services for alumni, including FAQ, telephone, text message, email, form-based, and real-time online consultation. Statistics on reference consultation services across the 30 libraries are presented in [Figure 4: see original paper].

To accommodate alumni schedules, most libraries allow advance appointments with librarians for face-to-face consultation. For example, the University of Chicago Library states that if alumni encounter difficulties locating subject-specific materials or need research assistance, they may request librarian appointments, during which librarians can provide appropriate resources and help develop research strategies. Twenty-six libraries offer subject librarian consultations, accessible through various contact methods.

**4.5 Space Services** American academic libraries also open space services to visiting alumni, demonstrating premium library services through printing, computer access, study rooms, Wi-Fi, and accessibility facilities.

**4.5.1 Printing Services** To meet alumni printing needs, libraries provide printing services. Among the 30 surveyed libraries, Caltech and Washington University in St. Louis prohibit alumni printing and copying but offer free scanning assistance. The remaining 28 libraries provide printing services, typically through purchased copy cards. Various printing card fees are shown in .

**4.5.2 Computer Services** All 30 libraries provide multiple computers on different floors for readers (including alumni). Some institutions prioritize current

students. For example, MIT grants priority to internal users, and alumni may be asked to relinquish computers to current students at any time. Carnegie Mellon limits alumni computer use to 2 hours daily, with priority given to current faculty and students. The University of Pennsylvania restricts alumni to 10 days of electronic reading room use per month, with the space reserved exclusively for current students during exam periods.

**4.5.3 Wi-Fi Services** Most libraries offer free Wi-Fi to alumni for anytime, anywhere connectivity. Among the 30 libraries, 24 allow alumni to connect without passwords. Some impose time limits: Emory automatically logs out alumni after 4 hours; Princeton limits alumni to 7 days of wireless access per month; Northwestern requires registration with personal information for 7-day access (renewable); Virginia offers 28-day access (renewable).

**4.5.4 Study Room Services** To provide better environments for academic discussion and exchange, some libraries offer study rooms. For example, Princeton's various branch libraries provide group study spaces, including the Engineering Library's group study rooms, Firestone Library's Trustee Reading Room, Skylight Atrium, and shared seminar rooms. The University of Chicago makes reading rooms, meeting rooms, study rooms, and cafés available to alumni. Dartmouth's Book Arts Workshop allows alumni to learn letterpress printing, binding, and illustration techniques for free, though current students have priority.

**4.5.5 Accessibility Services** In Western developed countries, accessibility services receive high priority, and academic libraries are no exception. American libraries demonstrate strong consideration for readers with disabilities through extensive accessibility design and facilities. For example, Stanford prominently indicates ramp locations, elevator positions, and wheelchair-accessible pathways. MIT provides specialized equipment including Braille typewriters and duplicators, text-to-speech software for blind or visually impaired readers, text magnification software, customizable keyboards, portable note-taking tools, canvas bags, and flashlights. These facilities accommodate different disability groups, ensuring their full participation in library learning.

**4.6 Other Services** Beyond the above services, some libraries offer personalized services enriching alumni activities.

The University of Pennsylvania Library has developed an "Alumni Travel Program" providing educational travel experiences. To enhance these experiences, library subject experts prepare reading lists covering destination history, politics, culture, and environment before travel, and offer special lectures afterward. To date, the program has created reading lists for 25 countries, with the list continuing to expand.

For over 70 years, Dartmouth has operated a “Memorial Alumni Book Program” where alumni commemorate deceased classmates by funding meaningful book purchases. The library carefully selects books and creates special bookplates bearing the honored classmate’s name. These books serve as useful and meaningful natural memorials, sustaining connections between alumni and between alumni and the institution. Since its inception, over 50 classes have participated, adding more than 12,800 volumes to the collection.

## 5. Implications of American Academic Library Alumni Services for China

American academic library alumni services are relatively mature, offering valuable guidance and reference for Chinese libraries.

**5.1 Thoroughly Implement the Concept of Alumni Services** Currently, most Chinese universities require graduating students to return their library cards, which are then deactivated, ending library services. This practice creates emotional distance between alumni and their institutions and contradicts university humanistic spirit. Alumni with ongoing needs hope libraries will continue serving them to support their evolving professional development and lifelong learning.

To develop alumni services broadly, Chinese libraries must abandon closed concepts like “serving alumni may create negative impacts” and thoroughly embrace alumni service philosophy. American libraries’ high development level stems from their open service philosophy, shared by university leadership, library staff, and alumni alike. American libraries welcome all forms of alumni access (physical and virtual), and staff actively serve alumni, creating an atmosphere where alumni naturally utilize library services. Chinese academic libraries should learn from this open concept and serve alumni more proactively.

**5.2 Improve Alumni Service Systems** National laws, regulations, and library policies significantly influence alumni service development. American libraries’ high service levels correlate with robust legal frameworks and comprehensive regulations.

At the national level, China’s *Regulations on Academic Libraries* [9] and *Public Library Law of the People’s Republic of China* [10] each mention “social users” and “the public,” supporting services for social users (including alumni). These laws provide legal foundations, but lack detailed service provisions. Relevant departments should revise and improve these regulations, explicitly incorporating alumni services to promote development.

At the institutional level, libraries should actively formulate alumni service regulations and strengthen systematic management. Chinese libraries should: (1) recommend optimal visit times (e.g., holidays or non-exam periods) to avoid peak usage and ensure current students’ priority; (2) offer various alumni card

types (all-in-one, access, borrowing, printing) with clear, standardized fees; (3) detail all alumni services with comprehensive rules for each; and (4) establish violation handling procedures, including appropriate fines or privilege suspensions based on severity.

**5.3 Establish Dedicated Alumni Service Columns** Placing alumni columns prominently on library websites with continuous, rich interfaces ensures service effectiveness and sustainability while facilitating alumni affairs management. For alumni, this enables quick location of service regulations and content, saving search time. American libraries' column placement and content merit emulation.

Chinese libraries should address both location and content:

**Column Location:** Fewer navigation levels enable faster resource access. Chinese libraries should emulate American practice by establishing alumni columns as first-level categories in prominent homepage positions.

**Column Content:** Alumni columns should comprehensively introduce and categorize library services, enabling alumni to clearly understand available services and rights, preventing conflicts during service acquisition. Content should include: (1) Document lending services: valid document processing (access cards, borrowing cards, printing cards, all-in-one cards), in-library reading rules, and alumni borrowing regulations (quantity, period, renewal, fines, interlibrary loan); (2) Electronic resource services: source, quantity, type, and access conditions; (3) Reference consultation: FAQ, telephone, text, email, form-based, and real-time online consultation; (4) Space services: printing, computers, Wi-Fi, study rooms, and accessibility facilities; and (5) Other personalized services.

**5.4 Expand the Breadth and Depth of Alumni Services** Chinese academic library alumni services remain relatively singular in content and form, mostly offering basic services like in-library resource searching, print material reading, and reference consultation, with insufficient attention to interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing. Chinese libraries must expand service breadth and depth to elevate alumni services.

**Breadth:** Libraries can determine service scope based on current capacity and progressively expand. Initially, services could target doctoral and master's alumni, who have higher education levels and greater library usage needs. After gaining experience, services can expand to undergraduate alumni, and eventually, in advanced stages, include alumni from library consortium member institutions [11].

**Depth:** Libraries should achieve deeper openness through: (1) Document lending services: Currently, most Chinese libraries only offer in-library reading. To meet alumni borrowing needs, libraries should grant borrowing rights and gradually increase borrowing quantities to improve collection utilization. (2) Electronic resource services: Chinese libraries should follow American practices by

restrictively opening electronic resources, including self-built databases, open-access journals, institutional repositories, and free web resources. Libraries should negotiate with database vendors for alumni versions while ensuring access controls protect intellectual property. These services require substantial human and material resources, so appropriate fees may be charged. (3) Space services: Including printing, computer access, Wi-Fi, study rooms, and accessibility facilities.

**5.5 Collaborate with Alumni Associations** “After graduation, alumni go worldwide with no obligation to inform us of their whereabouts. We cannot track them. Moreover, library books have few copies—if lost or unreturned by alumni, it creates significant problems” [12]. As noted by Mr. Cheng Huanwen, Director of Sun Yat-sen University Library.

Indeed, relying solely on libraries to obtain alumni information and serve all alumni is difficult. However, China can learn from American libraries by actively collaborating with alumni associations. Alumni association participation reduces service costs, lightens library burdens, and facilitates sustainable service delivery.

Libraries and alumni associations can collaborate in two main areas:

**Promotion:** Channels include: (1) Promoting to graduating students through prominently displayed “Alumni Services” boards at library entrances and distributing service information through colleges to graduating classes; (2) Face-to-face communication during university and library anniversaries to understand needs and gather feedback; and (3) Promotion through library websites, WeChat official accounts, Weibo, and library apps.

**Service Delivery:** Libraries and alumni associations can jointly produce and distribute alumni cards to reduce costs. For electronic resources, associations can independently or jointly provide accessible databases. Additionally, they can jointly organize and manage alumni donations, offering remote learning courses to donors as reciprocity and continued engagement.

Alumni services occupy increasingly important positions in university libraries worldwide. Chinese libraries have been reluctant to fully embrace alumni services due to concerns about negative impacts, with low staff enthusiasm. American academic libraries lead globally with diverse, continuous service content and methods. Therefore, analyzing American practices provides valuable references for Chinese libraries to better serve their alumni.

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### Author Contributions

**Liao Fan:** Established the paper framework and provided revision suggestions.  
**Jiang Fangfang:** Drafted and revised the manuscript.

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### Survey and Enlightenment of Alumni Services in American Academic Libraries

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**Abstract:** [Purpose/significance] By analyzing and researching the alumni services of thirty American academic libraries, the paper sums up the enlightenment of the alumni services of American academic libraries for China. [Method/process] The paper conducts analysis from the six aspects in-depth,

including alumni column setting, literature lending service, electronic resource service, reference service, space service and other services through the network investigation method, the E-mail investigation and the induction. [Result/conclusion] Academic libraries in China can get the following enlightenments: thoroughly implementing the concept of alumni services, improving alumni services system, opening the column of alumni services, expanding the breadth and depth of alumni services, and carrying out cooperation with alumni association.

**Keywords:** alumni; alumni services; academic libraries; USA

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

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