

## SWOT Analysis of Pellissippi State Community College Library

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### Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of a survey of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC) in Knoxville, Tennessee based upon the perceptions of a sample of eight people with active interest in the library. Those surveyed include four employees of the PSCC library and four users of the library. The employees surveyed will provide an internal analysis of the library and the users of the library will provide an external analysis.

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An analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the Pellissippi State Community College (PSCC) library measures the perceptions of people with a vested interest in the library and its performance. Surveyed for the internal analysis were the library director, a reference librarian with over forty years of experience, an Educational Resources Center coordinator with ten years of experience and a library assistant with twenty-eight years of experience. For the external analysis, one current student, one former student, a retired reference librarian and one community patron were surveyed. Upon the request of those surveyed, no names will be used. Rather, those surveyed will be given a unique identifier if they are quoted in this document. Unfortunately, scheduling prohibited face-to-face interviews in several cases. Therefore, much of the information received for this analysis was in written form which can eliminate the emotional involvement present in a face-to-face interview. Regardless of the format of the response each respondent was asked to define what they see as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were with respect to the PSCC library and each category will be taken in turns.

Half of the respondents (three internal and one external) said that they believe the library's greatest strength to be the staff. The perception differed between internal and external with regards to why the staff was the greatest strength, however. The external respondent, KB, said that "all the people who worked in the library were always friendly, courteous, willing to help...and ABLE to help" whereas the internal respondents deemed the staff's strength through each staff member's willingness to take up slack where needed due to budget shortfalls and to learn and keep up with changes in technology. Two internal and two external respondents said that the electronic resources available at the PSCC library including access to databases from "anywhere, on campus, in class, at satellite campuses and anywhere via [the] web" (PN, personal

communication, 2011), were a strength. Two external respondents believed that the library serving the community at large was also a strength in that the “library serves the local community as well as student and faculty populations” (MH, personal communication, 2011). In addition, several other strengths were mentioned including the availability of group study rooms, the faculty status of the librarians, the library’s collection both of print and electronic resources, up-to-date website, library as place, collaboration with TBR and UT to share resources and “updated computers for use by students and library staff” (NM, personal communication, 2011). By far, the responses under the category of strengths were the most numerous and detailed.

However, every institution does have its weaknesses and the PSCC library is no exception. Three respondents, two internal and one external, said that the greatest weakness was the fact that the library is consistently understaffed. The former PSCC student elaborated by saying “the biggest thing I remember is that the library always seemed to be understaffed. The only times I ever had problems with anything was when there were too many people asking for help and not enough people available to render it” (KB, personal communication, 2011). In addition to understaffing, one respondent also said that a weakness is the fact that the librarians are all nearing retirement and are unfamiliar in some cases with technology trends. While one respondent deemed the library as a comfortable study area as being a strength, the current student who responded disagreed by saying that lack of comfortable study areas was a weakness. Additionally, “librarian interaction with students in the reference area” (PN, personal communication, 2011), collaboration with faculty in order to provide instruction, “lapse of interdepartmental communication” (LR, personal communication, 2011), “too many off-campus sites to support” (NM, personal communication, 2011) and lack of community knowledge of library access were also cited as weaknesses.

Where weaknesses exist, opportunities to improve the library's services also exist and that was the next question posed to the respondents. One respondent, the current student, was quite vocal on the subject of recreational reading saying "I realize the primary purpose of the library is for research, but I think the value of the library to existing students would be much higher if it also concerned itself with students' recreational reading" (DN, personal communication, 2011). The student went on to suggest a reading lounge and having programs available for recreational readers. Another external respondent said that the library needs to find a way to "increase the awareness of library services, especially reference help in many formats and the availability of electronic resources" (MH, personal communication, 2011). The most frequently cited opportunity for the PSCC library was embracing the new technology trends and continually staying up-to-date on the ways that the library staff can utilize new technology within the realms of information literacy, particularly through assisting and training "our patrons in making better use of their time in the library... [and] to be more discerning" (LR, personal communication, 2011). The retired librarian suggested that the librarians "hold information sessions for the community to publicize under-utilized existing resources such as the Tennessee Electronic Library. This could be a way to market services to the community and possibly attract students, either traditional or non-traditional. Personal contact with the public is always useful" (MH, personal communication, 2011). Overall, the respondents seemed to agree that the biggest opportunity for the library was through interaction with our users.

No SWOT analysis would be complete without a discussion of the threats to the library. My respondents were virtually unanimous on the largest threat to the library: the budget. Tied with the budget as a threat, was the internet and other electronic resources and the "perception that everything is available electronically to everyone makes it difficult to justify not only

additional staff but increased space for library functions” (MH, personal communication, 2011). Additionally, increased college enrollment makes space on campus very valuable and one of the threats cited is that “library space is not seen as ‘priority real estate’ that should be preserved” (MH, personal communication, 2011). One respondent said that “short-sightedness of the administration [of the college]” is a potential threat and that “book availability being so focused on subjects used within classes shows me that the administration at some level sees the library only as a means of maintaining accreditation” (DN, personal communication, 2011). While staying abreast of current technologies was cited as an opportunity, it was also cited as a threat because of increasing costs of electronic resources and because there are often “too many interfaces for electronic resources for students to learn” (NM, personal communication, 2011).