A Comparative Analysis of Library Access Policies at UChicago, MIT, and Harvard, By Benny Parks

"When you expect fair play, you create an infectious bubble of madness around you," Jenny Holzer's provocative words ring true in the context of academic institutions, especially when examining the entry and exit policies of the University of Chicago. How this quote has inspired the following paper and how it pertains to UChicago's library policies is where I have pinpointed my focus. In the following paper, I will be drawing comparisons with MIT and Harvard, while also referencing the insights shared in the book "In The Shadow of The Ivory Tower" while also I will investigate the past, present and future of UChicago's library access.

To comprehend the evolution of UChicago's library policies, it is crucial to understand the historical perspective. David Bottorff, UChicago's Collection Management & Circulation Services Librarian, revealed that, until 2008, visitors needed a university affiliation to access the collections. The now-obsolete InfoPass was a last-resort method for granting access to researchers. However, with Bottorff's tenure, significant changes occurred, notably the establishment of the Mansueto Library in 2012.

One of the key revelations from my conversation with Bottorff was UChicago's transition towards a more inclusive space. The university's libraries, traditionally perceived as exclusive, are adapting to meet the needs of a broader community. The newly introduced position of Director of Community Engagement exemplifies this shift, aiming to bridge the gap between the academic institution and the surrounding community. The future trajectory of UChicago's libraries towards inclusivity will be illuminated through ongoing data collection, scrutinizing the nuances of library usage by both students and community members.

In contrast, MIT's library access procedures have traditionally been more open. A comparative analysis between MIT and UChicago brings to light the dichotomy in their

approaches. MIT, known for its collaborative ethos, seems to embrace a more accessible model. The juxtaposition of these two institutions provides valuable insights into the diverse strategies employed by top-tier universities.

Harvard, another Ivy League institution, stands as a middle ground between UChicago's historical exclusivity and MIT's openness. By exploring Harvard's library access procedures, we gain a nuanced understanding of the spectrum of policies within prestigious academic institutions.

To contextualize these findings, "In The Shadow of The Ivory Tower" offers a broader perspective on the challenges faced by contemporary libraries. The book underscores the importance of adapting to changing societal dynamics, a theme resonant with the shifting policies observed at UChicago.

David Larson, UChicago's Director of Access Services, sheds light on the university's historical stance on public access. The terminology on the university's website and what was once Harper Library's procedures reveals a once-exclusive policy, with access granted only to those "on a path to legitimate research." However, post-pandemic, the university is undergoing a trial period, utilizing data collection to inform its future direction. The shift from exclusivity to inclusivity is prompted by the valuable insights derived from this data.

In conclusion, the evolving nature of these policies reflects the broader societal shifts and the ongoing commitment of academic institutions to balance the needs of students and the surrounding community. As we enter this trial period, the data-driven approach promises a more inclusive and adaptive future for university libraries. The hope is that, "the infectious bubble of

madness" can be addressed properly so that the next hundred years academia can move towards inclusivity.

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