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Making Outreach the Library's Mission

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Abstract

University and community outreach is an important part of library services, which fosters cohesiveness while involving adequate community support. This paper examines how outreach has become an important part of the library's mission. Many outreach examples include the partnering of libraries with university departments, offices, and organizations. Other examples include university libraries partnering with community groups, museums, and non-profits. Currently outreach projects are carried out across all libraries, however, a greater emphasis is placed on the recent outreach accomplished at Southwestern Oklahoma State University Libraries.

Introduction

Oxford English Dictionary (Outreach, 2018) defines "outreach" as: "The activity of an organization in making contact and fostering relations with people unconnected with it, esp. for the purpose of support or education and for increasing awareness of the organization's aims or message." Most libraries conduct some method of outreach without fully recognizing it has already been implemented. Outreach is a vital part of the library, not only for retaining current users but also for reaching new ones. Outreach when performed correctly, helps the library stay relevant while remaining active in the campus and community. Creating a variety of outreach projects results in bringing attention, and increasing usage by showcasing library collections (Harris & Weller, 2012). Beware of making assumptions, focus on user's know needs, and any means of graphic communication used should be of quality (Munro, 2017). There are several different partners the library can take advantage of to reach new users, and keep current users returning.

Review of Literature

There is a wide range of literature regarding outreach and the library. For academic libraries trying to stay applicable in a time with increasing technology, Google and Wikipedia, and a downturn in library circulation, libraries need to take their services to their users (Shapiro, 2016). Libraries must be willing to adapt to the changing times. By hosting more social type events the library can create a stress-free area, make students more comfortable, aware of library services, and librarians (Seeholzer, 2011). Reaching out to users in multiple ways is important, and relying on flyers or a single Facebook post is not the way to bring in a large number of people. Expanding the reach of communication with multiple pathways catches the attention of the university's busy populace (Munro, 2017). What better way to remain relevant than to partner with members of the university and the community? Partnering with the local library greatly expands the university library's reach, and creates relationships that can further promote both the library and university (Broek & Rodgers, 2015). Those who read for pleasure, hone skills that increase academic learning. University libraries can learn from public library counterparts the

path to build an ethos of reading for the university (Mahaffy, 2009). Universities need to be pivotal in the literary and scholarly life of their community (Hillery & Henkel, 2010).

Faculty, staff, and students are the main focus of academic libraries. If librarians develop the mindset of including the surrounding community in their focus, amazing things can happen (Barry, Lowe, & Twill, 2017). Rethinking outreach as one of part of the library's mission is a way to be proactive for both the library and the university (Arrieta, Brunnick, & Plocharczyk, 2015). Many positive outcomes can occur with outreach programming, librarians can use knowledge and technology to preserve the history of the local area, its people and their experiences. These methods of outreach can put the library in the role of the institutional memory for the university community, and the community at large (Cho, 2011). Outreach has the ability to expand the library's presence on campus and the community, inspire donations, increase usage while increasing services (Harris & Weller, 2012).

Outreach as a Part of the Library's Mission

It is typical for academic libraries' mission statements to focus on supporting the students and faculty in their education and research, but many libraries are actively casting a wider net to include community outreach (Harris & Weller, 2012). Libraries need to be intuitive and develop relationships between the local community and university, only marketing collections and services are no longer enough to stay current. Libraries should not solely promote their institutions but should include the faculty, students, alumni, and staff (Shapiro, 2016). Kent State University Library lists serving the broader community after students and faculty (Seeholzer, 2011). The University of Michigan (U-M) Library works to serve the community outside the restrictions of academic scholarship and research (Broek & Rodgers, 2015). New Mexico State University Library feels as a land-grant university, the outreach events to promote a culture of reading are necessary (Mahaffy, 2009). Florida Atlantic University's John D. MacArthur Campus library magnified its mission by deepening students experience with research and scholarship while increasing engagement in the community (Arrieta, Brunnick, & Plocharczyk, 2015).

Partnering with Departments, Offices, and Organizations on Campus

Many libraries unknowingly perform outreach currently by working with departments on campus. Even if the library actively works with a few departments, there are always more available. Fostering a good working relationship with University departments, offices, and organizations are imperative to quality outreach. Working with faculty may come naturally to librarians, but they should not forget about offices and organizations across campus. The Office of Sponsored Programs, the Office of Research and Economic Development, the Grant Office and the IT Center all make great partners for the library (Mannheimer, 2014). Connections made now may lead to partnerships the library never dreamed possible later. As an example, at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) a faculty member was able to collaborate with many colleagues by using outreach exclusively. This faculty member worked closely with UIC's history, political science, African American studies, English faculty, and Humanities Institute to host an exhibit and symposium (Harris & Weller, 2012). Kent State University Libraries saw positive outcomes of from hosting a variety of social events. Students commented how much

they enjoyed the social events as it gave them a chance to peruse the stacks without worrying about an assignment, and many felt more comfortable asking the librarians for assistance after meeting them in an informal environment (Seeholzer, 2011). The Rohrback Library of Kutztown University regularly hosts art exhibits circling around a variety of themes and plans different activities to create interest (Shapiro, 2016). To encourage reading and improve literacy many libraries host book clubs, campus-wide reads, book discussions and even participate in the National Endowment of Arts Big Read (Hillery & Henkel, 2010). Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) Libraries work in conjunction with the Office of Sponsored Programs to give faculty the opportunity to submit items, such as articles and posters to be added to the Institutional Repository. As part of the Institutional Repository, SWOSU Libraries began digitizing multiple documents and files to preserve the University's history. Yearbooks, newspapers, course catalogs and more are all searchable and accessible for anyone to view through the digital commons. SWOSU Libraries have also partnered with the Art Department to showcase exhibits in the library. Resident's Life and SWOSU Libraries arranged ten-minute massages to be given in the library during finals in conjunction with the library's De-Stress Fest. On SWOSU's branch campus, the library works with the language arts department to create an event for area high school juniors every spring. While the students write a timed research paper, the librarian and language arts faculty offer continuing education to the visiting teachers. In a blind review, SWOSU faculty score the student's research papers, and the top three are awarded small scholarships. Each fall the Library and Language Arts Department co-host a Literary Festival. The day-long festival consists of talks from area authors, journalists, photographers and those in the field of humanities. This event is open to students, faculty, area high schools, and the public. Students submit work, such as short stories, poetry, and photography, to be published in the student anthology handed out on the day of the festival. The anthologies are also added to the Institutional Repository.

Partnering with the Public Library

Programming is a common component in both public and academic libraries. It is a natural step then for public and academic libraries to work together. SWOSU Libraries is partnering with our area public library system to host an author this fall. There will be a ticketed dinner held on campus for guests to have a more intimate meeting with the author. The author will be doing area school visits, as well as a talk that will be open to the public. This will be the first of many prospective co-sponsored programs between SWOSU Libraries and the Western Plains Library System. Other universities are partnering with their local public libraries forming relationships by sharing resources, and access to one another's patrons through promotion. U-M, wanted to try a joint program, and contacted the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL) with the possibility of a pop-up library in Ann Arbor, as a result, Library on the Lawn was born. AADL and U-M Libraries have collaborated on many different projects suggesting partnerships foster relationships. This relationship created educational opportunities across the district and university populations and established a bond which highlights both parties (Broek & Rodgers, 2015). Academic and public libraries can share database resources to ease the financial burden on both sides. Another idea of partnering with the public library is providing reciprocal cards for patrons to use at both public and academic libraries.

Partnering with Community Groups, Museums, and Non-Profits

Many academic libraries support their university's plan for being an active member of the community. Libraries have a distinct advantage with special collections, programming, and knowledge available (Barry, Lowe, & Twill, 2017). Taking an active role in library groups locally is another resource to aid in outreach and form alliances. The Chicago Collection Consortium is made up of libraries, museums, and other institutions with archives of Chicago-related collections regarding its history and culture (About us, 2018). Some of the members include UIC, Northwestern University, Chicago Public Library, Art Institute Chicago, Chicago History Museum, and The Newberry Library. By joining together each member's archives are preserved and available for free with open access to all (Current Membership, 2018). When universities showcase their Special Collections, through partnerships like the consortium, they are exposed to a whole new group of users that might not otherwise be aware of the collection or the library. This is also a way for libraries to show their value to the university and beyond. Review what community groups are active in the area, look for opportunities in which the library could partner, and do not be afraid to go out on a limb. Churches, synagogues, cultural organizations and other libraries all make great partners (Shapiro, 2016).

Occasionally the opportunity to partner on a project is funded by the government. The Community Historical Recognition Program, funded by the Canadian government, gave the University of British Columbia (UBC) a chance to work on a three-year civic-based research project titled, Chinese Canadian Stories: Uncommon Histories from a Common Past. This project helped to rescue the history of the Chinese Canadian immigrants, and stories of individuals before they were lost forever. The UBC had many partners on this project to make it a success. Partners included the Vancouver Public Library, Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, and City of Vancouver Archives to name a few. Gee How Oak Tin Benevolent Association, one of the first Vancouver Chinatown clan associations, also aided the UBC librarians in this project. Working with partners to collect and create this special collection, the library is linking both faculty and community with research, and functioning as an institutional memory for the Chinese Canadian people (Cho, 2011).

As an example of partnering with a foundation, Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Libraries joined Taras Oceanographic Foundation in an experimental outreach program. Taras wanted to work with the library for a few reasons. FAU Library has access to students and a population, while they may not know about Taras, they could benefit from a partnership. Students, who participate in the program, acquire knowledge in the field of conservation ecology and marine biology and can use their volunteer-time for Taras in their future studies or careers. The first program was such an achievement, FAU Library and Taras worked together on a second program, The Palm Beach Dolphin Project. This program added internships, information management, grant writing, and how to relate to the community to the student opportunities. With these programs, the library built a strong partnership with Taras increasing the library's research and teaching, and both students' and the community's awareness of conservation ecology and marine biology also increased (Arrieta, Brunnick, & Plocharczyk, 2015).

In 2016, SWOSU Libraries and the university's Art Department joined forces to host a one-day workshop featuring Cheyenne artist, George Levi. Prior to the workshop, a display was showcased in the library of artwork created by Cheyenne artists. Due to the popularity and outcry

for longer sessions, Dr. Siriporn Peters, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design and one of the event coordinators, decided to apply for grants to try to give the people what they wanted. Then in 2017, SWOSU Libraries and the Art Department joined forces again, this time including the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site to host a four-part workshop titled: Make Your Own Moccasins with Southern Cheyenne Artists, George Levi, and Creg Lee Hart. Due to Dr. Peters' hard work, a grant was received from the Oklahoma Arts Council to pay for the majority of the supplies needed for attendees to make their own moccasins. This workshop was offered at three locations: Al Harris Library on the Weatherford campus of SWOSU; Administration Building Meeting Room on the Sayre campus of SWOSU, and the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in Cheyenne. The four workshops were held over the period of time between November 2017 and April 2018. Each session covered a different process in the making of moccasins, which resulted in the participants having a completed pair of moccasins by the end of the workshop. In addition to the workshop, SWOSU Libraries has partnered with the Washita Battlefield National Historic Site to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Battle of the Washita. In this partnership, SWOSU Libraries has developed a special collection in our digital repository to house various photos, videos and other items of events held during the anniversary year. Examples of events included in the repository are Owa Chita Sunday: A History Cooking Class; Reading Ranger Storytime; Moccasin Marathon; Make Your Own Moccasins workshop, and many others.

Final Thoughts

In these ever-changing times, libraries must be creative, work collaboratively with faculty, students, and the community to form partnerships where all jointly benefit. Libraries should take advantage of what makes them unique, whether that be in special collections, technology housed in the library, or a willingness to try something new. Look for trends, needs, and interests of the University and its surrounding community, and how the library can meet those needs (Broek & Rodgers, 2015). Be aware of area festivals, museums showings, or public libraries doing inventive programming, and reach out to offer the skills or facilities of the University library. Partner with high schools to share knowledge of primary sources, discuss special collections or create a traveling exhibit. Outreach is important, libraries should offer services to make connections both on and off campus.

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