

Student Affairs Connection: Promoting the Library through Co-Curricular Activities

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Abstract

Librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) University Libraries developed the “Student Affairs Connection” program in order to market the Libraries to students in co-curricular settings and to collaborate more closely with the Student Affairs Division. The program also provides the opportunity to seek student input on Libraries’ services and resources and to communicate directly with them in a variety of ways. The program has multiple facets: a liaison program where librarians are assigned to specific student organizations and services such as Student Government and Residence Life, a Student Libraries Advisory Council (SLAC) representing diverse groups of students that meets with librarians several times a year, staffing a Libraries’ table and providing information and giveaways at information fairs, and sponsoring special events such as Game Night each semester.

Introduction

Academic libraries constantly seek new ways to increase outreach efforts on their campuses so that their students and faculty are more aware of their services and resources. Librarians have traditionally worked closely with faculty both to assist them with their research and to develop meaningful information literacy learning experiences for their students. In recent years libraries have expanded their services to include multi-faceted Learning Commons that provide myriad offerings such as electronically enhanced group studies, multimedia services, and technology assistance. To inform students of these services, librarians have collaborated with other offices at their institutions to reach them in co-curricular settings. A common model is to work with the Student Affairs office on activities such as academic integrity, welcoming or recruiting new students, and reaching out to particular groups of students such as athletes or residential students. Librarians also work with student services such as the Writing Center or tutoring services and often offer special events for students in their libraries.¹ Many academic libraries have established student advisory councils

to ascertain students’ needs and to assist in forming policies and developing services.²

To enhance our marketing and outreach efforts and to develop a more focused connection with students, the University Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro developed the “Student Affairs Connection.” The program enables us to reach students in co-curricular settings and to collaborate more closely with the Student Affairs Division and student organizations. It also provides the opportunity to seek student input on Libraries’ policies and services and to communicate directly with them in a variety of ways. The program built on many established relationships between the Libraries and various campus communities to make them stronger and more effective.

Background

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro is a Research University with High Research Activity with an enrollment of 14,300 undergraduates and 3,225 graduate students. While 80% of freshmen live on campus only 31% of the total student body is residential. The graduate student enrollment is largely part time (59%), and 11% of undergraduates are part time. The student



body is diverse with a large population of adult students. The University Libraries are comprised of Jackson Library and the Music Library with combined holdings of 1.2 million book volumes, over 47,000 e-journals, and 500 databases. The Libraries' full-time faculty and staff total one hundred. With no addition or significant renovation since 1973 we are challenged to provide the up-to-date spaces and services that 21st-century students expect.

The Public Services Mission of the University Libraries states:

"Public services provides the environment, expertise and systems to advance and support learning, knowledge-seeking and research to the University community and North Carolina citizens."

Within that mission are several goals that the Student Affairs Connection program supports:

- Providing up-to-date learning spaces, technology, and equipment.
- Developing marketing and publicity programs to ensure that the UNCG community is aware of Libraries' resources and services.
- Connecting with UNCG student, academic, and administrative units to integrate the Libraries with the curriculum and student life

Student Affairs Connection is comprised of several components including a liaison program, a Student Libraries Advisory Council, participating in activities fairs, and a program of special events.

Liaisons

Having library liaisons to academic departments is an established model in academic libraries. In a 2007 article, Candice Dahl recommended that libraries broaden the concept of liaising to include non-academic units on their campuses.³ The UNCG Libra-

ries have had a liaison program to all academic departments and majors since the early 1990s. Many librarians also developed informal working relationships with student services and student organizations. For example, one librarian is a faculty fellow in one of the Living Learning Centers. Another served as chair of the campus Writing Across the Curriculum Committee and worked closely with the Writing Center. In 2007 the Libraries established a more formal program that assigns liaisons to specific student organizations and offices. The goals of the liaison program are to market Libraries' services and resources directly to students, improve communication, and learn about particular student needs. At the present time we have liaisons to sixteen offices or organizations including Student Government, Greek Societies, the Writing and Speaking Centers, Dean of Students, Athletics, Student Success Center, Residence Life, Service Learning, and the Living/Learning Communities.

Liaisons work with their units in a variety of ways depending on the organization. They communicate with leaders and directors; meet with key staff; and attend lectures, meetings, and social events. Several liaisons provide relevant programming. Some programs are academic in nature such as plagiarism presentations for Academic Integrity or information literacy sessions for courses in the Living Learning Communities. Others are informal informational sessions such as presenting to student athletes or Student Government about Libraries' services and resources. Liaisons also make presentations to staff including the Student Success Center and Residence Life so that staff are aware of appropriate times to refer students to the Libraries. Student Success, in particular, takes advantage of our group spaces for their tutoring services. Within Residence Life we are especially active with the Living Learning Communities and participate in programs such as "First Year Check-In," a program that monitors how new students are faring. We also offers satellite reference service in the Living Learning Centers. The liaison to "UNCG Green"

has worked closely with the program to offer a successful Sustainability Film series. The liaison to Disability Services communicated with that office and arranged training about working with disabled patrons for Libraries' staff. Participating in these activities also provides the opportunity to listen to students and to gain feedback from them about their needs.

The liaison program also provides a vehicle for sending promotional emails about the Libraries. Campus-wide emails are limited at UNCG, so we have to develop other mechanisms to send them. And even though students usually communicate with each other through social networking, texting or IM, they indicate that email is still a good way to reach them. When we have a new service or an event, we develop a catchy email, usually with a graphic, and liaisons send it out through their contacts. We also easily get time on the campus radio station since we have a liaison to it!

Student Libraries Advisory Council

At UNCG, the Student Libraries Advisory Council (SLAC) was established in 2007 to serve as a communication channel between the Libraries and both the undergraduate and graduate student bodies. Students are recruited through Student Government and represent diverse groups such as traditional students, adult students, graduate students, and both residential and commuting students. We also include Libraries' student employees. SLAC meets once or twice per semester with public services and communications librarians. It provides a forum for students to express their needs regarding Libraries services and resources and also serves as a sounding board or focus group for proposed changes in Libraries' policies, procedures, and services that affect the student body. Other activities include feedback on brochures, advice on giveaways, a discussion on appropriate marketing messages, and the best way to reach students with these messages. It was a bit surprising that in this age of social networking SLAC recommended using rather traditional com-

munication methods such as email, flyers, and posters. Recently we had the opportunity to buy new furniture so we showed SLAC several possibilities and asked the group to rate them. SLAC students also help us staff the information fairs and special events discussed below.

Organizing the meetings and getting participation can be challenging. Students interested in serving on the SLAC are usually already active on campus and committed to the organization. Meetings are often scheduled round 5:00 p.m., and having food available is an important incentive. In addition, we discovered that scheduling two identical meetings helps elicit more participation from the students. Meetings of the Advisory Council work best when the environment is informal because you never know who will ultimately show up and what they will say. In spite of some of these logistical challenges bringing students to the table and hearing their voice is vital and necessary. It's often entertaining as well!

Activity Fairs

A presence at events for recruiting and new students is an effective method to market the library. In addition, a survey conducted by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers in 2006 indicated that the library ranks as the second most important campus building after facilities in the students' degree program when deciding on a university to attend.⁴ The UNCG Libraries participate in numerous orientation and information fairs that students or prospective students and their parents attend. For new students we staff a table at Spartan Orientation Advising & Registration (SOAR) during June when students and families come to campus to pre-register and to attend programs. We also offer library tours during SOAR and have entries in the student and parent printed guides. For prospective students we participate in Admissions events which are held on several Saturdays throughout the year. Often it is the parents who are most interested, but we have also spoken with students who are interested in

librarianship and information science as a career. On the first day of classes UNCG holds 'Fall Kick-off' where dozens of student organizations and services have tables. At this event we co-sponsor a table with a local coffee house. At each of these events we provide library brochures, bookmarks, other types of information, and additional giveaways. The most recent giveaway was a carabiner with the Libraries' url on it. The most important aspect at these fairs is a friendly face and willingness to answer questions and to be a bit pushy about handing out information.

Special Events

Special events serve as excellent outreach efforts and help bring students into the Library. One of our Triad neighbors, Wake Forest University, held a Game Night, and we decided to copy them and host one, too.⁵ The first Game Night was held in the fall of 2006 as a way for new students to come to the library and also to meet other students. We collaborated with Student Government and the Campus Activities Board. At this first Game Night members of the UNCG Science Fiction and Fantasy Club (aka SF³) attended, and they have co-sponsored it ever since. The Libraries section off a space on Friday nights and provide free pizza and soft drinks. We also borrow screens and projectors for electronic games, and students bring their controllers and games. Students also play board games and cards, and some come just to eat and socialize. Game Night is now an eagerly anticipated event every-semester, and more than two hundred people attend. It's advertised through Facebook and Twitter as well as more traditional means such as flyers, posters, and email. After the first Game Night the SGA president pronounced us "hip!" What more could we ask for?

UNCG University Libraries sponsor other events as well. When we first developed our "collaboratories" (electronically-enhanced groups studies), we held a Trick-or-Treat event near Halloween. Libraries' staff decorated the collaboratories, and stu-

dents toured them while staff explained their purpose. The students had the opportunity to judge the decorations and, of course, pick up candy. We held our first Stress-Free Zone in 2009 right before exams and provided bubble wrap for students to pop, games from "millennials'" childhood, and light refreshments. Each semester we provide free coffee during exams which is greatly appreciated by students.

Outcomes

Working closely with students influenced many decisions to make the Library more user-centered. In one of the first meetings with students in 2005 we received feedback that the Library "looked like a prison." We had been seeking ways to improve the physical appearance of the Library and this comment provided even more incentive. The two biggest requests were for a twenty-four-hour space and to allow food and drink. A twenty-four-hour space was opened in 2008 and was an immediate success. The policy to allow food and covered drinks was changed that same academic year. Many other changes were made to update the facility and to improve the space. We added carpeting on the first floor and purchased new furniture to provide soft seating and a variety of study spaces. As previously mentioned, group studies were developed and quiet floors were also established. Rotating art shows began in 2006. Feedback from students indicated that they needed to a laptop checkout service, and this service started in 2008.

Reception to these changes has been reflected in a variety of measurements. Our gate count has jumped 42% over the past four years. Much of this increase is also due to a Connector between the Library and the Elliot University Student Center completed in 2005. The 24/5 space was so popular, we added an extra amount of space after one semester, and the counts increased 164%. Because the laptop lending increased 79% in one year, the Libraries are adding more laptops to circulate. The first-come, first-served group areas are always busy, and the re-

served spaces are heavily booked. We conducted LibQual +™ in 2008, and our overall perceived mean was 7.47 in a nine-point scale. Every two years the University of North Carolina system conducts Sophomore and Senior surveys that include questions about the library. During the past ten years our overall satisfaction score has increased 9%.

Conclusion

Student Affairs Connection provides many opportunities for collaboration within the Libraries and across campus. Staff from across the Libraries participate actively in the programs which encourages staff interaction among departments and offers the chance for a great deal of creativity, innovation, and fun. Working with student organizations has been extremely rewarding. Our traditional student interactions are through information literacy sessions and assisting them with their research at public service points or in consultations. Student Affairs Connection has enabled us to reach students in new and different settings and to promote our resources and services more effectively. Getting to know students better and being a part of their organizations is an added bonus. The program has also enhanced our collaboration with colleagues in Student Affairs and Student Services offices. All of us are more aware of what we all have to offer to our students. During the 2009-2010 academic year the Student Affairs Division was moved to the Provost's Office. The Libraries are excited to participate in this renewed synergy between Student and Academic Affairs units and look forward to working together even more closely in the future.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example: Swartz, Pauline S., Brian A. Carlisle, and E. Chisato Uyeki, "Libraries and Student Affairs: Partners for Student Success." *Reference Services Review* 35, no. 1 (2007): 113-117; Cummings, Lara Ursin. "Bursting out of the Box: Outreach to the

Millennial Generation through Student Services Programs." *Reference Services Review* 35, no. 2 (2007):288-291; Tenofsky, Deborah, "Teaching to the Whole Students: Building Best Practices for Collaboration between Libraries and Student Services." *Research Strategies* 20 (2007): 287-289. (note: this entire issue of *Research Strategies* is a special issue, "Meeting the Student Learning Imperative: Supporting and Sustaining Collaboration between Academic Libraries and Student Services Programs.")

² See, for example, Deuink, Amy L, and Marianne Seiler. *The Library Student Advisory Board: Why Your Academic Library Needs It and How to Make It Work*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2009; Pillow, Ashley. "Put SLACers to Work for Your Library: The Student Library Advisory Committee at Loyola University-New Orleans." *College & Research Libraries News* 68, no. 10 (2007): 642-3; Benefiel, Candace R., Wendi Arant, and Elaine Gass. "A New Dialogue: A Student Advisory Committee in an Academic Library." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 2 (1999): 111-13.

³ Dahl, Candice. "Library Liaison with Non-Academic Units: A New Application for A." *Partnership: the Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 2, no. 1 (2007): 4-6.

⁴ David Cain and Gary L. Reynolds, "The Impact of Facilities on Recruitment and Retention of Students," *Facilities Manager* March/April (2006): 58. http://www.appa.org/files/FMArticles/fm030406_f7_impact.pdf (accessed March 23, 2010)

⁵ Sutton, Lynn, and H. David Womack. "Got Game? Hosting Game Night in an Academic Library." *College & Research Libraries News* 67, no. 3 (2006): 173-6.

