K-State Grant Opportunities Encourage Librarian/Faculty Collaborations

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Abstract

Academic librarians are expected to reach out to faculty to promote library services to the university community and to represent our departments in library meetings. But beyond these functions, faculty may not consider librarians as potential collaborators, especially on projects unrelated to the library. One prime opportunity for librarian/faculty collaboration at Kansas State University is the Tilford Incentive Grants. The grant's stated purpose is to "encourage the infusion and assessment of the Tilford multicultural competencies with the educational experiences of our students". This paper discusses the proposal and outcomes of one such collaboration between a journalism faculty member and the department's subject librarian.

Introduction

Traditionally, librarians' responsibilities to their respective departments involve outreach efforts to sell or promote library services and resources; research assistance to faculty and students; and materials acquisition. Collaborations between teaching faculty and subject librarians tend to be limited or somehow connected to classroom instruction. Even when librarians participate in university or departmental grants, they assume the role of researcher, archivist, or similar supporting role. Collaborative initiatives between librarians and teaching faculty need to extend beyond the traditional bibliographic instruction and resource procurement if libraries and librarians are to remain relevant to their respective user communities.

A cursory search of the last ten years of the literature results in over 400 citations, nearly half of which discuss information literacy, bibliographic instruction, collection development or some other library-centric topic. In a 2010 article by Gordon, the author notes librarians' desire to move beyond the traditional one-shot and toward a more collaborative course. Although this article discusses information literacy, it accurately states a universal need for a more expansive collaborative environment between faculty and

librarians. Additionally, Riehle points out, "librarians can no longer afford to be passive service providers" but must become advocates, not only of the library but advocates for themselves, professionally speaking. They must leave the safety of the stacks and begin to forge new types of relationships based on their skills as researchers, writers, and partners in the educational process. Brinkman discusses the library's cultural programming as a way to foster collaborations, soliciting faculty participation and promoting the event to faculty and the community.

Librarian/faculty collaboration is essential if academic libraries intend to remain vital to the university community. But these relationships cannot be limited to library-specific programs. Indeed, it will be necessary to expand beyond the library offerings to demonstrate our value in a variety of academic settings. The referenced articles do suggest that librarians are willing to move beyond offering traditional services and assume more active roles in that directly impact users in and outside the library. It would be interesting to follow the direction these new relationships take.

Kansas State University's Tilford Incentive Grants encourage more active collaborations with faculty and allow librarians to interact



with faculty and students in ways that demonstrate abilities that reach beyond the confines of library-specific routines. The Tilford Group was established at K-State in 1997 as an outgrowth of its participation in the Kansas Regents Conference on Diversity and Multiculturalism. The conference allowed participants to "explore strategies, exchange ideas about practical applications of diversity education, and establish collaborative efforts" (The Tilford Group) that would dynamically impact student learning, increase multicultural competencies, and optimize the new graduates' marketability. The Tilford Group defines multicultural competence as "the knowledge, skills and personal attributes needed to live and work in a diverse world" (The Tilford Group).

The grant program, funded by the Provost's Office, encourages multi-disciplinary faculty collaboration to create new or enhance existing classroom activities that infuse multicultural experiences into the classroom. Normally, librarians have access to the classroom when teaching faculty ascertain a need for the class to see a demonstration or presentation of library resources. In this case, a journalism professor with whom I have an existing relationship actually approached me as a partner on the grant proposal. The professor noted that the library was a natural partner for this project, not to mention that the awards are higher for partners (\$4,000) than for individuals (\$2,000). While I was excited by the prospect of working with a faculty member in a new way, I knew that my role in the classroom would be limited to my usual library resources presentation and wondered how I could substantively contribute to the process as well as to what would transpire if our proposal was funded.

The evolution of information from print to digital and the overwhelming abundance and increasing complexity of the information world mandate that librarians discontinue their roles as mere information gatekeepers. Although faculty and students may be slow to recognize this development, librarians recognize the need to transition into

proactive partners in the educational process. We are now expected to actively development collaborative relationships with teaching faculty, including partnering on projects such as grant proposals, digitization projects, journal hosting, institutional repositories, and electronic records management. Although there are any number of ways we might approach these relationships, we must first convince teaching faculty, not only of our willingness to pursue this new role, but of our capability to assume the role.

The journalism professor, naturally, assumed the lead role on this grant project, given that she planned to use the grant proceeds to enhance her students' classroom experience. The proposal was for a two-day workshop, specifically for students enrolled in her Information Gathering class, which included inviting a professional journalist to facilitate several sessions. The workshop would serve two purposes: to teach students to effectively search the Internet, gather information and data, and evaluate that information; and to find and use the information for a reporting assignment specific to multicultural issues per Tilford Incentive Grant criteria.

After being notified that our proposal would be funded, the professor began negotiation with the journalist while I worked with the Libraries' student graphic design unit to develop promotional materials and arrange for their distribution. Since several sessions were scheduled to take place in the library, I also reserved a technology room. Additionally, the professor requested that I purchase some print resources that she planned to use in the classroom.

Outcomes

From the librarian's perspective the workshop sessions held much potential, much of it untapped. First, attendance at various sessions was sparse, in part, because the professor attempted to accommodate student schedules. During the proposal writing stage, the professor and I discussed the



possibility of extending invitations to area journalists but were unable to do so because of the grant's criteria. It is important to note that the workshop was intended to enhance multicultural learning for a specific class. Additionally, though, the students seemed unaware of the journalist's stature in the profession (he won a 1989 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting) and failed to take advantage of having access to professional expertise. The sessions took place during the day when classes were in session and, even though several sessions were repeated, it was only natural that students, even those enrolled in the Information Gathering class, would have schedule conflicts. However, there were opportunities for the students to meet one-on-one with journalist to discuss their writing projects and the profession, but the students did not take full advantage of them and, consequently, there were times when the journalist was idle.

Conclusion

This experience provided opportunities for the subject librarian to demonstrate a skill set that extends beyond the traditional role of bibliographic instruction and materials acquisition and to work with a faculty member on a project that was only remotely related to the library. And, although in this case outreach efforts to students probably were not out of the ordinary, they did provide more interaction with students, thereby underscoring the connection between the library and the department and to those students in the department. In the long term, the relationship with this faculty member is further developed and, by extension, departmental ties are strengthened. Direct outcomes of administering the grant include a new role in the development and delivery of an online class that the journalism professor is creating for next fall. I will present the usual demonstration of library resources delivered via a chat session, but I participated in the meeting with the professor and the instructional designer, something that would probably not have occurred had I not worked with her on the grant.

Libraries are and will always be the cornerstone of the university students' experiences, but we must be sensitive to changes in the way students learn and access and use information. We must also strive to develop relationships with teaching faculty that demonstrate our willingness and ability to partner in creating an optimal learning environment for students. Kansas State's Tilford Incentive Grants provide librarians with the opportunity to partner with faculty in ways that move us beyond the traditional. Not only do these types of grants act as seed money for creative classroom initiatives, but they also facilitate librarian and faculty collaborations that, over time, can blossom into long lasting, continual relationships.

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