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2015

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Marketing to Faculty in an Academic Library

Marketing a library needs to take into account the various stakeholders within the constituency. Often, academic libraries focus on students as their main 'target market', but it is important not to overlook faculty members as important patrons and allies. The needs of faculty are very different from those of students, as are the messages and the communication avenues. This article discusses various ideas on how to engage faculty with the library.

When we think of marketing and outreach activities in a university library, we often think of our target market as students. However, there is another group on campus who also need to be aware of and supportive of our efforts in the library – the faculty and instructors. Often, they as much as the students are ignorant of the riches the library holds, and could benefit from knowing more about the services and resources we have at the library – both to inform their students and to add to their own research.

One obvious target for communication to faculty is information literacy training. Most academic librarians endeavor to get into – or better, become fully integrated with – as many classes as possible. And yet in some institutions, the uptake of this service is less than ideal. Librarians working at the reference desk know there is a need – and yet faculty don't seem to realize to what extent this need really exists. And perhaps even more surprisingly, no matter how many times we say it, some faculty are surprised when they hear that we are available to come into their classrooms or partner with them on projects which can improve their students' research skills.

Another aspect of information literacy training which is often overlooked by faculty is that which is aimed at faculty themselves. White¹ discusses reasons why faculty members may be averse to attending library instruction sessions, and offers some suggestions as to how they can be encouraged to participate more in workshops designed for instructors. She points out that their reticence is likely due to not wanting to seem inadequate in front of their colleagues, or less adequate than a librarian; or

¹ Marjorie V. White, "Information Literacy Programs: Successful Paradigms for Stimulating and Promoting Faculty Interest and Involvement," *Reference Librarian* 38, no. 79/80 (2003).

because they want to feel like they are more in control or want more involvement in the learning process. As a result, White suggests that one way to overcome faculty resistance to training workshops is to create a participatory environment in the class, where all participants feel a sense of collaboration in the process.

At the University of Lethbridge Library, one way we have managed to showcase our 'information knowledge' talents is to hold training workshops for EndNote, a citation management software program to which the University subscribes. Faculty and graduate students alike sign up regularly for these workshops, which help establish the library's research credibility and promote the library as a useful resource, with useful services.

In their paper, "Faculty outreach: A win-win proposition", Reeves et al outline their extensive efforts at faculty outreach initiatives². These include not only the aforementioned faculty-focused workshops, but also increasing liaison contact efforts, creating specialized web links to fill out acquisition and instruction requests, and faculty guides to library services. While their situation at a small college was rather unique (their library was located on the second floor of a building housing other departments and thus not very visible), they nonetheless made great strides in making faculty more aware of them and the services they offered.

Often, 'marketing' to faculty is less about formalized PR initiatives and more about building personal relationships. This was emphasized in Reeves et al³, and is certainly something that nearly every academic librarian knows from experience. Most class contact comes from those faculty members with whom you have actually spoken to, whether directly about instruction or not; many questions and discussions with faculty members occur at informal events or after attending departmental meetings, etc. The key is really to 'get yourself out there' and be visible around campus – both in your liaison area,

² Linda Reeves et al., "Faculty Outreach: A Win-Win Proposition," *ibid.*39, no. 82.

³ *Ibid.*

as well as at general faculty and university functions. It's harder to forget about what the library can offer when a librarian is seen everywhere.

Academic librarians would also do better at making themselves visible as 'academics', and therefore more capable of teaching students and faculty about information literacy, if they made their own publications and scholarly activity more evident. Many of us are very active in research, publishing, and presenting, and yet it remains a well-kept secret within the library walls. We need to trumpet ourselves and our accomplishments as loudly as other faculty members do – as well as taking an active role in our faculty associations, for those of us with faculty status, and other things such as faculty teaching days. If we are seen as academics in the area of information literacy and research, we will get called on more to showcase those skills – and perhaps to partner as research experts with faculty in their own endeavors.

Librarians at Metro Community College did a great job of making information literacy more meaningful to instructors who may not otherwise be familiar with the terminology⁴. They published a six-part series in their faculty newsletter defining and explaining how to help students achieve information literacy and also created a bookmark. It was well received and led to more faculty collaboration.

As librarians, we see the need for student information literacy instruction at the reference desk. Many instructors are unaware of students' deficits in this area, assuming that they already know how to research and use information⁵. Instructors also are often unaware of librarians' expertise, ability, and willingness to instruct their students more formally. McGuinness⁶ shows how these misperceptions can affect the ability for librarians to effectively integrate information literacy into the curriculum, and offers several ideas on how to promote information literacy among the faculty. These include more education-

⁴ Laura E. England and Rebecca J. Pasco, "Information Literacy-- Making It Real!," *Community & Junior College Libraries* 12, no. 3 (2004).

⁵ Don Dickenson and Denver Colorado State Library, "How Academic Libraries Help Faculty Teach and Students Learn: The 2005 Colorado Academic Library Impact Study.," (2006).

⁶ Claire McGuinness, "What Faculty Think: Exploring the Barriers to Information Literacy Development in Undergraduate Education," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 6 (2006).

specific publications and conference attendance by librarians, so that faculty members realize the work that we are doing and perhaps take it more seriously than if our publishing and presented is restricted to the library world.

At the University of Lethbridge Library, a colleague and I have begun a small outreach campaign to faculty on our own. This fall, we plan to hold a wine and cheese 'open house' at the beginning of the fall term to which we will invite all faculty – specifically targeting new faculty in order to introduce them to their subject liaison. We will also continue to visit the Human Resource orientation sessions that are held every fall to introduce new faculty members to various University services – an initiative we started last year, and which was well received. We only visit for 5-10 minutes to introduce ourselves, tell them a bit about our library resources and services (including the availability of information literacy instruction), and to hand out the business cards of their liaison librarians.

Something else the University of Lethbridge Library does – and many others are doing – is to celebrate faculty authors in the library. We have a permanent display in the library which features new faculty publications; other libraries have taken this even further⁷ with digital displays on LCD screens to bring even more visibility to these publications (including e-books). They also highlight this information on the library website. Another way libraries can promote faculty authors is to hold book launches or annual author receptions to celebrate books published in the previous year. At the University of Lethbridge, this function is run out of the research services office, but if your institution isn't currently doing this it might be a great way for the library to ally with faculty. Bonnet et al describe their event in the aforementioned article; other libraries also hold events like this, some with full programs with speaking opportunities for the authors.

⁷ Jennifer Bonnet, Barbara Alvarez, and Sigrid Anderson Cordell, "Let's Get This Party Started: Celebrating Faculty Authors in the Library," *College & Research Libraries News* 75, no. 10.

Being taken seriously means being seriously involved in the university as a whole. At the University of Lethbridge, librarians have faculty status and as such are involved in various university-wide committees such as the Curriculum Coordinating Committee, the General Faculties Council, and the Faculty Association. Being present helps us insert the library perspective on the topic at hand, and also makes us visible members of the faculty, not minorities to be sidelined. We have taken leadership roles in the university on things like copyright and EndNote training. And we hope to be even more involved in training the faculty on information literacy issues by giving brown bag sessions and presenting at our annual Teaching Day, hosted by the Teaching and Learning Centre.

Like most of us in today's world, faculty are inundated with mail and e-mail. Sometimes e-mail communication can get scanned and deleted too easily; information brochures can be quickly recycled. What really makes a difference and stands out is personal communication. This is true in the consumer products category, but is also true in our promotional activities to faculty. The best promotion for the library comes from those that work there, and the best way for that message to be received is via in-person communication. The library brand is something each of us that work in the library is responsible for; every interaction we have with patrons, whether it is at a university social event, a transaction at the reference or checkout desk, or a chance encounter with a student shelver – we must all be aware of the image of the library that we are actively creating. The more positive these interactions and experiences, the more positively the library's 'brand' will be seen. And the more positive the library in the patron's eyes, the more open they are to talking to us, listening to what we have to offer, and receiving and acting upon our messages. It is only through these personally built relationships will we get the recognition, respect, and involvement that we desire from the faculty, and from the university as a whole.

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The editors welcome your submissions to this column. Please email Nicole Eva at nicole.eva@uleth.ca or Erin Shea at eshea@fergusonlibrary.org if you have an idea for a future column related to marketing libraries.