



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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BUDGET-FRIENDLY OUTREACHING STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The late 2000's brought serious financial challenges to academic libraries with budget cuts in education throughout different states. Many libraries have been unable to hire new librarians and created extra work for librarians on duty. A normal workday for a modern academic librarian can involve working at the reference desk, researching new databases, working on collection development, updating a circulation manual, cataloguing books, working on collection inventory, etc. The "to-do" list is endless. Despite the heavy workload, librarians cannot forget the icing on the cake, also known as "outreaching"—the glue that brings users to use library services and turns non-library users into potential library lovers.

Creating different venues for outreach to students, faculty, and staff is vital for the campus as a whole to benefit from all the services and resources a library has to offer. The sky is the limit when it comes to outreach, but librarians often stick to the more traditional methods, as they are what is expected of many academic librarians: establishing a trustworthy relationship with patrons, creating attractive exhibitions, participating on campus committees, and inviting faculty to bring their classes into the library.

Establish a trustworthy relationship with patrons. When patrons approach the reference desk, take the time to fully assist them. If a student is looking for a book, do not only write a weird sequence of numbers and letters and point the clueless novice to the stacks. Be alert and avoid looking busy at the computer. Some librarians have that "don't bother me" attitude that drives students away.

Create attractive exhibitions. Acknowledge and inform students of special months and weeks: National Library Week, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, among many others. Display books on the topic, as well as other attractive artifacts related to the theme.

Participate on campus committees. Inform campus faculty and staff of the latest library news, and establish an affable relationship with them. Faculty who value the importance of libraries typically participate more in library orientations, supply textbooks to the reserve collection, recommend materials, and are library advocates.

Invite faculty to bring their classes into the library. "Sell" the importance of a library orientation to faculty, and encourage them to bring their students. The best orientations are those designed especially for each class!

Design a library newsletter for students and faculty. Disclose new databases, new books, new policies and procedures, highlight exhibitions, inform students about librarianship, etc. Include a library word search and fun library facts, as well. Have copies available at the circulation desk, and email campuswide. Inform campus staff about library updates to emphasize the importance of libraries and stimulate visits.

Create informative and eye-catching videos. Highlight services and resources through short videos. Videos can include how to access the services offered by the circulation and reference desks, how to use the copier, and how to find materials in the library catalog. Show educational videos at the library entrance.

Let patrons choose books. Create a fiction collection based on the interests of your clientele. Ask students to submit titles of books they would like to have in the library.

Broadcast your library. If your campus has a radio station or a newspaper, utilize these venues to advertise your library and attract new users.

Join a popular social network. Create a Facebook account for the library, and inform patrons about what is happening in an informal environment. Post pictures, show informative videos, and toss in fun facts once in a while!

Be a mentor. Mentorship programs match mentors and mentees based on the interests of the mentees. Mentees learn about mentors' professions and daily campus activities.



Create a Library Club

A library club allows students to learn about library services, take leadership roles, perform charitable activities, participate in campus events, assist other students, and make new friends.

Promote fundraisers. Think book sale! It could generate enough funds to support club activities. At least a month prior to the big sale, start a campaign to encourage students, faculty, and staff to donate their books to the club. Arrange for donations to be deposited in a bin inside the library. Have members take charge of emptying the bin and sorting through resellable materials.

Offer library bibliographic instructions. Knowing students prior to offering a library orientation makes them more comfortable to ask questions during the session.

Offer volunteer opportunities. Give members a chance to learn more about libraries while improving their customer service skills. Have positions available and ask members to provide their available hours. Give preference to students interested in volunteering for a full semester. If they do well, offer to write them a letter of recommendation for a future job.

Organize reading groups. Learn whether members have suggestions about what to read. Otherwise, suggest interesting readings appropriate to your group.

Lead book discussions with ESL students. Plan this activity at the beginning of the semester. ESL instructors are receptive to helping their students master English and may offer extra credit for lab hours if students decide to attend ESL book readings. Ideally, one advisor should be present during the readings, and selections should reflect diverse reading levels. Have students take turns reading during sessions, review vocabulary after each small chapter, and ask questions.

Allow members to work on library displays. Many students are talented with arts and crafts, and they love to show their creative side.

Go on educational field trips. Members have a chance to bond on field trips. Take them to visit other libraries, an observatory, a museum, or go camping and read poetry by the fire.

Allow creativity to flow. Permit members to create events such as poetry readings, AIDS Walk, reading for children, etc. A poetry reading event, for example, can be successful campuswide if a partnership is established with instructors from other departments. Individuals with the best performances could be awarded gift cards from the bookstore.

There is no secret to outreaching successfully. Just know and understand the needs of current library users and potential users. Careful planning of ideas,

advertising, and true dedication are key ingredients for achieving desired goals. Enthusiasm for outreach will mobilize your audience and draw students, faculty, and staff naturally toward your services and resources. Maintain a consistent level of interest and engagement with outreach, especially if you decide to establish a library club. Members will be as committed as their advisors. Outreaching creatively is a way in which librarians reinvent themselves and solidify their status as an elemental piece of the education puzzle.

On May 6, 2011, the Cerritos College Library Club was awarded club of the year, and several members were recognized for their outstanding contributions.

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