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Creative Use of Library Skills in Campus Collaboration

Keywords

student outreach, community outreach, leadership, campus partnerships, teaching

From the Field
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Abstract

Community outreach is an emerging field in academic librarianship as university libraries reach out to unique populations with new services. This article explores how academic librarians can impact their communities through creative collaboration with other campus units and fresh interpretations of professional trends. These ideas are illustrated through a case study of library instruction at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). The study suggests that while librarians must be creative in finding opportunities to collaborate, they have a great deal of creativity to offer through their multidisciplinary teaching, innovative pedagogy, professional research into concepts of leadership and organization and other emergent skills of the evolving librarian.

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Background

Riding the currents of change, academic libraries have plenty of motivation to extend beyond their traditional clientele. Technology has made information everyone's business, so librarians find themselves competing for attention in what used to be their sole domain. The pervasive crisis of funding for higher education has increased the pressure on libraries to justify their value. On a more positive note, advanced forms of technologies and services have given libraries more to offer their patrons. Small mobile devices and social media have increased the accessibility of libraries beyond the boundaries of campus. New pedagogies and media allow us to teach about library resources and skills in nontraditional ways. Archives and special collections, once the province of professional researchers, are now open to all and spearhead library promotional and instruction efforts.

Jack Hang Tat Leong has classified the library outreach movement as follows:

1. *Extension of services.* This includes the offer of library cards and borrowing privileges to the general public as well as to online resources within the library itself.
2. *Information Literacy.* These programs, originally geared towards students, have been expanded to include faculty and staff and the outside community. Older generations not familiar with computers can learn the basics in a supportive environment, and underprivileged populations can gain access to the internet. These two groups represent a powerful intervention into the social problem of the Digital Divide.
3. *Connecting departments within the university.* As the "heart of the campus" and the original interdisciplinary unit, libraries have a unique role in bringing different departments together. Libraries have always enabled scholars to collaborate across subject boundaries. Now, libraries also assist with advising, orientation, and staff development activities.



4. *Scholarly conferences and symposia.* Outreach also takes the form of programmed events. Libraries give scholars a space to present their work to audiences outside their discipline including members of the public. Everybody wins with scholars gaining an audience, the library getting more exposure and use, and the public getting a free education.¹

Such is the diversity of outreach efforts.² However, Tina Schneider identifies a unifying trend behind them:

What is encouraging are the many examples of “fourth-generation cooperation,” where libraries have moved from the first generation of working in isolation, to the second generation of networking with libraries of the same type, to the third generation of cooperative systems of multi-type libraries, to a fourth generation of “a cooperative combination of various types of libraries and non-library agencies engaged in related activities.” Many business, government, health, and school-related outreach programs are examples of reaching the fourth generation.³

Collaboration with new partners is the answer to the increased demands for outreach. This case study is an example of “fourth generation” outreach, and also corresponds to item three from Leong’s schema above: connecting departments within the University.

Local Communities: Overview of the Faculty OWL Leader Program

FAU’s vibrant culture takes the owl for its mascot which is personified as Owlsley. A presence in nationally televised sporting events, Owlsley “keeps his feathers in top shape by working out twice a week.” In addition, Owlsley excels academically by maintaining a strong GPA and a minimum of 12-15 credit hours.⁴ This comprehensive symbol of the University has been appropriated by the Division of Student Affairs for

a leadership program which is designed to “engage and involve faculty members in the development of students as future exemplary leaders within and beyond the campus community.”⁵ Rather than remaining a pure entertainer, Owlsley has been enlisted into the more serious business of developing leaders.

Such a general goal exceeds the scope of any one academic department, and the Division of Student Affairs, accordingly, has made the program University-wide. The aim is to connect students with academic and professional expertise in personalized leadership training. The leaders, “Faculty Owls,” are recruited from across campus through an application and interview process. At this writing, the program itself consists of three parts:

1. Present at the iLead Annual Student Leadership Conference
2. Facilitate a Leadership Reading Circle
3. Present at a Student Leadership Institute.

Two conference presentations open to the campus community bracket a five-week Reading Circle with discussions on a book led by the Faculty OWL Leader.

While the connection with libraries may not be immediately clear, Erin Meyer notes, “For academic libraries wishing to extend their outreach, existing and potential short-term, project-based collaborations are the low-hanging fruit. Such partnerships include student organizations, various institutional offices, and councils of one kind or another.”⁶ That is, librarians must not be put off by the absence of immediate outcomes for the library because investment in collaboration with other academic units will enable more concrete results at a later stage. This initial commitment involves a degree of gambling and an act of faith in both the methodology of cooperation and in the ability of librarians to advance

their goals within the collaborative environment. As Meyer notes, “project-based collaborative relationships need not be as formal, resource contributions may not be equal, and partners may have different goals...short term outreach projects will increase the viability and reach of an event or initiative with almost any level of shared support.”⁷ The Faculty OWL Leader program represents a test case of this idea. Behind its comical mascot, it offers a means for the library to collaborate with the Division of Student Affairs to gain new access to students in a teaching role. While library resources are not overtly involved (yet), the elements of outreach and student access are basic to the library’s service. The program offers a platform for future planning.

Librarian Involvement in the Faculty OWL Leader Program

But first, librarians must get in the door. This was made possible by the fact that FAU librarians have the faculty status required for the program, and this case illustrates the importance of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) standards for faculty status for academic librarians.⁸ Faculty status not only recognizes the qualifications and work of librarians but also creates new opportunities for them to work with other faculty members.

The theme of leadership in the Faculty OWL Leader Program is another feature that can be turned towards the interests of the library. The First Year Seminar is used by many universities to improve the quality of undergraduate education on a number of fronts. Libraries have been regular participants, providing instruction to prepare new students for their research assignments. Yet, libraries have also become involved in the larger mission of first year seminars to develop the total student beyond the boundaries of any one academic topic. This purpose is reflected in common themes for first year seminars which are intended to teach critical thinking

skills while fostering an environment where students can learn more about who they are and how they can contribute to the greater community by way of service and civic engagement.⁹ All of these topics have close ties to leadership.

Leadership has even more particular significance for librarians as part of outreach. Community outreach is currently imagined as a targeted effort to provide library services to distinct underserved populations. While certainly valuable, such a specific purpose argues against scalability. Libraries simply do not have the resources to lavish this kind of attention on all of their users. However, leadership training may offer a conceptual way around these limitations. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities “believes one of the best ways to prepare students for the challenges life will place before them lies in integrating the community with their academic experiences.”¹⁰ The Faculty OWL Leader Program seems to have anticipated these connections. It was inspired by James Kouzes and Barry Posner who state that,

The Student Leadership Challenge is about how young leaders, people just like you, mobilize others to want to make extraordinary things happen. It’s about the practices they use day to day. Leaders use these practices to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards.¹¹

This is a virtual blueprint for students to convert their learning into community action. Leadership training thus provides a much more comprehensive form of outreach by libraries, both to student populations and the communities from which they come, that reaches much further than what is currently imagined. The goal is desirable, but the natural question is what libraries can contribute to leadership training, which is not considered a core competency.



Case Study: The Librarian-Faculty OWL Experience

This section examines two iterations of the Faculty OWL program offered by one of the authors. Both sessions were very successful with active and sustained student participation, and they are instructive in relation to each other. The first Reading Circle used an assigned book, Mark Sanborn's *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader: How Anyone, Anywhere, Can Make a Positive Difference*. While having an assigned text imposed some constraints on teaching, it also showcased the assets and skills of the librarian leader. These appeared in the perennial challenge of getting students to participate, which is a vital concern for an all-discussion Reading Circle. To foster participation, the librarian provided a detailed outline of the book with extensive study questions to guide student reading. To her surprise and relief, each student came to the circle with a printout of the questions and with handwritten notes ready to engage. The librarian provided further support with genuine enthusiasm for the book and a sincere interest in the students' contribution, and these efforts were rewarded by the students' thoughtful and original participation.

The Faculty OWL/Librarian/Leader made another strategic decision in presenting the subject of leadership which can be divided into rational and emotional realms. The rational realm has to do with the solving of problems through logic and analysis. It is typically communicated through abstract language, schematics, and organizational charts. The emotional realm deals with more subjective issues of emotions, perceptions, unspoken communication, and values.¹² While more difficult to convey, its very complexity signifies its depth and importance. For both visionaries and managers, emotional intelligence is decisive to success. Accordingly, the librarian chose to highlight this more difficult aspect of the subject amidst the theoretical presen-

tation of the text. The following ideas were selected from the book and emphasized in the outline:

- Having a strong character so that others will trust you is key.
- Humility is another aspect of having character – not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.
- Competence – people who act like leaders exude confidence.
- Connection – when you have a genuine concern and care for others it shows and will create a connection between you and your peers.
- Being an effective leader means knowing how to motivate others – find out what motivates people, don't just assume that you know, because it's different for everyone.
- Leaders confront problems and not people.
- Focus on correcting the person's behavior and don't judge the person – focus on the "what" instead of the "who."¹³

These points address leadership issues that cannot be administered away with committees, charges, reports, deliverables, plans and discussions. Instead, the list explicitly names values of character and humility; it offers a concrete indicator of these qualities in the form of specific behaviors; and it includes the viewpoint of the other person to create mutual respect. By emphasizing emotional intelligence on the foundation of a well-organized session, the librarian combined leadership knowledge and instruction skills to give the students a rewarding experience. The Faculty OWL Program thus provides a new forum for a librarian to reach students beyond familiar instruction sessions.

Assessment is an important component of library instruction, and the librarian evaluated the



lessons learned in the first Reading Circle to improve upon the second one. The main innovation was to replace the old text with a new one: *Get the Cooke, Paco!: Valuable Lessons in Leadership From My Dogs* by Andrew Kruger. The only guidelines that were given for choosing the reading circle books were that the texts had to address the topic of leadership, be available through Amazon, and could not cost more than \$25.00 per copy. *Get the Cookie, Paco!* met these basic requirements, but more importantly, it allowed the students to build on the first assigned book by exploring the emotional aspect of leadership in a more natural way. The disarming and informal subject matter was the key here. In the course of the discussions, it emerged that many of the students signed up for the group in order to read about their favorite four legged friends, and the text allowed them to meet two memorable ones in Zeke and Paco, the author's unforgettable pet dogs. The Faculty Owl Reading Circle enabled the librarian to acquire just such a non-traditional book to engage student interest. Rather than studying emotion in the abstract, the book allowed the students to learn about emotion through emotion.

Following the basic plan of the text, the librarian first addressed the development of personal strengths within self-limitations followed by the formation of peer relationships. The librarian encouraged personal conversations where the participants would share their stories and provide examples of how they had faced adversity and overcome obstacles. These types of discussions seemed to be the most memorable as students listened and learned from their own mistakes as well as those of their peers. The free discussion of personal growth led seamlessly to problems of interpersonal communication and leadership with the dogs accompanying the Circle every step of the way.

For example, in discussing the networking that is fundamental to leadership, the students were presented with a stark contrast between Zeke

and Paco. Zeke, cool but friendly, showed an ability to relate to virtually any dog at the park. Paco, on the other hand, being shy and high strung, preferred a few close associates. Though different in style, neither was superior to the other; the two paradigms demonstrate different styles of communication. Similarly, on the subject of cultivating one's personal strengths, the book describes how Paco, gifted with great running speed, managed to initiate and win running contests with the dogs. The more heavily-built and powerful Zeke found himself unable to keep up. So, he resorted to cutting inside the arc of other dogs and t-boning them dramatically. On the subject of mirroring as a form of communication, the author related how when he sighed to himself in bed at night, he often heard an answering sigh from Paco, lying in the darkness watching him. Uncannily, the elements of communication and leadership find their counterparts in the behavior of the dogs, giving them a human character. This formula drew the Reading Circle into the subject of leadership much differently than the previous, analytical book.

Participants included students from diverse fields such as nursing, law and even a library staff member. The librarian had noticed how the staff member was reluctant to speak openly in front of groups of people, and the Reading Circle offered a way for him to interact with patrons in a relaxed environment, especially since many of the gatherings were held in the library. The staff member overcame his shyness, providing an example of how the collaboration of the reading circle cast librarians and students into fruitful new relationships.

Future Plans for Collaboration

The Reading Circles were such rewarding experiences that it is easy to imagine them used for other kinds of targeted outreach, and at this writing another project is underway. Yet for this case study, it remained to be seen how successful they were at the original goal of reaching out



to the campus community. Evaluating this success starts with assessment to capture and examine the data. Formal assessment was not part of the curriculum of the two Reading Circles which were focused on more fundamental questions of material, audience, and medium. But it is possible to examine an assessment instrument for another part of the Faculty OWL program—the introductory presentation at the initial program conference. At this conference, the librarian did not present on the books of the Reading Circles but on another collaborative project in which library staff participated in observations and data-gathering of local dolphin populations.¹⁴ The presentation focused on building bridges between different groups of people (librarians and scientists) and their accomplishments together which were features of the Reading Circle collaborations. The positive assessments of this presentation have favorable implications for the Reading Circles with which they shared common features. Such is the formal assessment completed so far.

With the powerful and personalized experience of the Reading Circle, the students got to know the librarian facilitator in an extended way, much more than in public service venues such as reference interviews, online chat, or one-shot instruction sessions, and this effect could provide the basis of additional assessment. Perhaps measures could be taken of ongoing contacts with the librarian or the library. Acquiring this data would require a longitudinal study over time, but the categories of interest are not hard to imagine as subjects could be assessed for their use of the library resources or spaces or personnel. Insofar as librarians play any role in patron use of the library, then the Reading Circle with its extended contact between patrons and librarians promises results.

Furthermore, at this writing, the Faculty OWL Leader program has just developed a new as-

essment tool that anticipates many of the concerns above. Apart from demographic information, the survey asks the following:

Q3. Did you develop a relationship with a faculty/staff member as a result of participation in the Leadership Reading Circle?

Q4. Did you develop a relationship with fellow students as a result of participation in the Leadership Reading Circle?

Q5. Did your participation in the Leadership Reading Circle develop/enhance your individual leadership skills? Please explain why or why not.

Q6. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your overall experience in the Leadership Reading Circle?

Q7. Would you recommend a Leadership Reading Circle to other students?

Q8. What is your definition of leadership now and how did it change (if at all)?

Q9. Explain how the book you read connects to a current event and/or community situation.

These questions anticipate the possible effects of the Reading Circle above. The data is not yet available, but the match between the evaluation instrument and the course design indicates that a useful assessment tool is ready to emerge.

Conclusion

It seems fair to say that this case study demonstrates real potential for libraries to collaborate with other campus units to make deeper connections to students as described in the literature. In particular, librarians can seek out new connections with campus units, especially those involved in campus-wide programming. The Faculty OWL Leader program is just a campus-specific version of a wider phenomenon. Assessing

the results of these new forms of collaboration requires a new perspective as well. Purely objective measures of gate counts, books borrowed, reference questions answered and the like may not tell the whole story. It is not that objective measures of success are unimportant; surely they are. The key is that truly collaborative action will produce collaborative results that may not translate instantly into the old metrics. As a version of this indirect or “fourth generation” type of cooperation state, collaboration is an investment in the future. By going out into the campus in any professional capacity, librarians create relationships and infrastructure that can, in time, return an abundant reward in librarian

usage that otherwise might never materialize at all. This approach has enterprise and imagination on its side. In the current climate of competition and uncertainty, can librarians afford to do less? This case study demonstrates how an enterprising use of faculty status, pedagogical skills, creative “collection” practices in selecting a “fun” non-academic text, and utilizing a personal interest of the librarian combined into a successful educational experience that, pending more formal assessment, stands to make the academic library more relevant to the college campus.

¹ Jack Hang Tat Leong, “Community Engagement – Building Bridges between University and Community by Academic Libraries in the 21st Century,” *Libri* 63 (2013): 220.

² For additional discussion of community outreach, see: Earnestine Adeyemon, “Integrating Digital Literacies into Outreach Services for Underserved Youth Populations.” *Reference Librarian* 50, no. 1 (85-98), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02763870802546423>. Toni M. Carter and Priscilla Seaman, “The Management and Support of Outreach in Academic Libraries.” *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 51, no.2 (73-81), <http://go.galgroup.com/ps/i.do?p=EAIM&u=gale15691&id=GALE|A318105219&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&authCount=1>. Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (Washington DC: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2001), 13-17.

³ Tina Schneider, “Outreach: Why, How and Who? Academic Libraries and Their Involvement in the Community.” *Reference Librarian* 39, no. 82 (210), <http://www.tandfonline.com/>

doi/pdf/10.1300/J120v39n82_13?needAccess=true.

⁴ Florida Atlantic University Mascot, “Owlsley,” <http://www.fau.edu/mascot/information.php>.

⁵ Florida Atlantic University, “2016 Faculty OWL Leader Program,” <http://www.fau.edu/leadandserve/education/faculty-owl-program.php>.

⁶ Erin Meyer, “Low-Hanging Fruit: Leveraging Short-Term Partnerships to Advance Academic Library Outreach Goals.” *Collaborative Librarianship* 6, no.3 (112), <http://go.galgroup.com/ps/i.do?p=EAIM&u=gale15691&id=GALE|A402347864&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&authCount=1>.

⁷ Meyer, 115.

⁸ ACRL Committee on the Status of Academic Librarians, “Standards for Faculty Status for Academic Librarians.” *C&RL News* 73, no.3 (160-161), <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/standardsfaculty>.



⁹ Aurelio M. Valente, "Passion, Purpose, and Service: Best Practices and Strategies for Integrating Service-Learning in First Year Seminars." *Journal of College and Character* 8, no.5, (1-16), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2202/1940-1639.1621?needAccess=true>.

¹⁰ Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* (Washington D.C.: National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2001), 13-17.

¹¹ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Student Leadership Challenge: Five Practices for Becoming an Exemplary Leader* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 1.

¹² Izhak Berkovich and Ori Eyal, "Educational Leaders and Emotions: An International Review of Empirical Evidence 1992-2012." *Review of Educational Research* 85, no. 1 (129-167), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0034654314550046>. Pierre-Alain Clavier and Joseph Deiss, "Leadership: Ten Tips For Choosing an Academic Chair," *Nature* 519 (2015): 286-287. Pia Lappalainen, "Predictors of Effective Leadership In Industry – Should Engineering Education Focus on Traditional Intelligence, Personality, or

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¹³ Mark Sanborn, *You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader: How Anyone, Anywhere, Can Make A Positive Difference* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 53-57.

¹⁴ Diane Arrieta, Barbara Brunnick, and Leah Plocharczyk, "Expanding Roles and Resources: Assessing the Collaboration Between Florida Atlantic University Libraries and Taras Oceanographic Foundation." *Public Services Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (79-94), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15228959.2015.1016197?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.