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Best Practices for the Collection of Feedback from Campus Constituents Utilizing Campus and Community Partners

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From the Field

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Abstract

The Clemson Libraries Campus Feedback Task Force was created to collect feedback from a broad sample of campus constituents. This article outlines the Task Force's approach and how the group effectively succeeded at the given charge. Seven Libraries employees, each with diverse expertise and a collaborative and supportive mentality, worked together to break down tasks and assign responsibilities based on members' strengths, identifying and relying on outside partners as needed. This article will discuss the importance of collaboration within a library task force on a project that required skills in online and face-to-face campus interactions by examining the composition of the group and the initiative's strengths and weaknesses. It will conclude with suggestions for other teams seeking to gather feedback from their communities.

Keywords: collaboration, communication, marketing, student feedback

Introduction

Running a task force to meet a common goal comes with innate challenges. It takes collaboration, diverse strengths, and partner expertise to be effective. In September 2018, the Dean of Clemson Libraries created the Campus Feedback Task Force to "develop a process by which Clemson Libraries can solicit online and in-person feedback from students, faculty, and staff on campus."[1] The task force was encouraged to complete three objectives: develop an online platform similar to "14 Days to Have Your Say," a project created by Western Washington University[2]; provide opportunities for campus constituents to offer feedback through social media; and develop a marketing strategy with a hashtag for the initiative. The feedback mechanisms used by the task force were intended to be fun and interactive, rather than formal surveys or in-person interviews.

As a result of past experiences, the Clemson Libraries Task Force chose to not only collect online feedback but also face-to-face feedback, which required two distinct areas of skill. In less than five weeks, seven Libraries employees—four staff, two faculty, and one student—planned and marketed a feedback event to encourage students, staff, and faculty to #TellClemsonLibraries what they thought about the library. At the time of the event, the Libraries served around 25,000 graduate and undergraduate students, 3,754 staff, and 1,638 faculty.[3] Over a 10-day span from November 7-16, 2018, the task force implemented both an online social media and in-person tabling campaign, successfully solicited 804 responses, and completed their charge. This article will discuss the importance of collaboration within a library task force assigned a project combining the need for proficiency in online and face-to-face campus interactions by examining the composition of the group, and the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative. It will conclude with suggestions for

other teams seeking to gather feedback from their communities.

The Task Force

Composition

The success of any group project relies on collaboration, building a team that can communicate effectively, and utilizing the unique strengths of each member. This begins with choosing the right people. The Dean was strategic in appointing seven employees to the task force who represented four units in the Clemson Libraries: Administration (1), Technical Services and Collection Management (1), Libraries Facilities (1), and Information and Research Services (4). The Dean also appointed a student to the group who was employed as the Library Outreach Intern. This position was created in 2017 as part of the University Professional Internship and Co-up program to assist with outreach initiatives. Due to the position requirements, the student had experience engaging with peers in and out of the library so adding them to the task force ensured all perspectives were present. Members brought marketing expertise, outreach experience, knowledge of the needs and desires of Clemson students, a can-do supportive mentality, and organizational and institutional knowledge to the team.

Yet even with ideal team members, successful collaboration is a challenge. To ensure a collegial and courteous approach to the project, as well as to each other, all ideas were welcomed during initial brainstorming and each was discussed respectfully with the best outcome for the project in mind. The short, high-stress time frame demanded a substantial level of engagement, participation, and teamwork from each member. The task force broke down their objectives into manageable assignments, identified and bolstered each member's strengths, communicated

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early and often, and identified internal and external partnerships essential to the team's success.

Communication

Internal communication was a key factor in the success of the task force. Members communicated regularly at all phases, from planning to implementation to post-evaluation and reporting. The team checked in frequently during the project in various ways. Regular meetings were scheduled with planned agendas and time for creative brainstorming. Impromptu in-person check-ins happened when a quick decision was required. Updates were sent through email and text messaging depending on the urgency or number of team members involved. For example, a full team update would be sent via email, but if two members needed to coordinate student volunteers or resolve an issue while tabling, a text message was more appropriate. The task force informed all Libraries employees about the campaign through the Libraries announcements and communicated more detailed information to those supporting and promoting the event. The team's final report and raw data were also distributed via email across the Clemson Libraries. This combination of methods ensured that all styles of communication and situational needs were taken into consideration during the project.

Working to the Strengths of the Members

Throughout the process, the task force worked to the strengths of the team. The Libraries Marketing Communications Coordinator was tasked with marketing, the Library Specialist who regularly conducts outreach was tasked with coordinating daily tabling for the campaign, and the Library Outreach Intern served as a peer representative of the student population. As the initiative gathered both online and face-to-face feedback, there were two types of feedback platforms to be managed and advertised. The Instruction Coordinator, who taught a course on the use of educational technology, suggested including the vlog platform FlipGrid to encourage students to leave short videos of their Libraries experiences. A Library Specialist who works closely with student workers gathered a group of volunteers diverse in age, race, gender, and majors for face-to-face tabling. The Library Outreach Intern, having design experience, created logo mock-ups from which the team voted for their favorite. The "10 Days to Have Your Say" campaign title and the chosen logo, which incorporated the hashtag #TellClemsonLibraries, were used across feedback platforms. (See Figure 1.) The Library Facilities Security Coordinator had connections with various buildings on campus and with the Clemson Area Transit (CAT) bus system and was able to partner with CAT to post flyers on buses, as well as gain campus permission to post them in academic buildings. The Library Specialist with contacts at and experience working with Campus Banner + Design, a team of students affiliated with the Division of Student Affairs that provide high-quality design and printing services, collaborated with the department to create physical signage for marketing. Each task force member brought different experiences, skills, and connections to the group.

Figure 1. Logo

Marketing

Successfully soliciting campus feedback relies on an impactful marketing campaign and providing ample means for feedback. Since the campaign included a face-to-face tabling approach and online feedback, marketing played a monumental role in tying these together, which demanded a large time commitment. The task force's main concern was promoting both platforms across campus to procure responses in the short time allotted. Marketing took skilled coordination and communication between the task force, Libraries employees, and campus partners to ensure that this goal would be met. To accomplish this, the Marketing Communications Coordinator was assigned to oversee the marketing strategies in close collaboration with fellow task force members, who checked in regularly to confirm that each aspect of the campaign was on target or in motion.

At the first planning meeting, the task force deliberated over the campaign's appeal to students and its fit with Clemson's culture and climate. After discussion, the team moved forward with the campaign title of "10 Days to Have Your Say," a truncated version of the original 14-day campaign to accommodate students' fall break schedules. Members then envisioned branding to provide marketing uniformity and generate recognition for the campaign through social media, print, and digital publicity.

The social media and digital marketing strategy included the creation of a blog website that contained ground rules, FAQs, Instagram, and FlipGrid widgets. Visibility was crucial, so the Libraries Web Developer advertised the blog using a ribbon on the Clemson Libraries homepage. To further raise awareness of the campaign, the Marketing Communications Coordinator and her student assistant scheduled frequent

promotional posts across three social media platforms—Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Clemson's student newspaper, *The Tiger*, also ran a feature on their website to further highlight the campaign.

The print marketing strategy combined the facilitation of many moving pieces, including collaboration with campus partners to create and distribute marketing materials. Eight outdoor step stake signs were created by Campus Banner + Design. (See Figure 2.) The task force then verified guidelines and permission requirements for distributing the step stakes on campus and worked together to install them in strategic locations. Task force members also placed flyers on study tables, cork boards, and office doors at all four campus Library locations, along with placing bookmarks at the main services desk and inside incoming Interlibrary Loan requests. Six posters, one for each tabling location, were printed using Clemson Computing & Information Technology (CCIT) services. (See Figure 3.) CCIT is a Clemson Libraries partner and is housed in the main library. Finally, the team ordered 36 t-shirts for volunteers to wear. All print marketing, like social media, used the #TellClemsonLibraries logo.

The task force proposed a budget to the Dean for approval to cover the cost of printed materials and participation incentives. Seven Amazon gift cards worth $25 or $50 each were drawn at the end of the 10 days—two for Instagram participants, two for blog participants, and three for in-person participants in the initiative. Students who submitted a response were eligible for the drawing; tabling participants could enter using an entry slip and online participants were automatically entered. To encourage in-person responses at tabling locations, the team purchased eight bags of candy and 200 King of Pops popsicles to give away, along with the remaining t-shirts. The task force chair and the Marketing Communications Coordinator collaborated with the Libraries Business Officer to complete all purchases following Clemson University guidelines.

Tabling Initiative

The 10-day campaign collected feedback on the blog and social media platforms from November 7-16, but members of the task force previously had more success with in-person feedback strategies. As a result, tabling at six locations across campus was incorporated into the plan to encourage in-person participation in addition to online feedback. This turned out to be the most successful method of feedback. Planning and implementing the tabling logistics took a great deal of coordination between task force members and Libraries employees. At the first task force meeting, the team considered logistics, including pros and cons of tabling at multiple locations, the number of volunteers needed, types of incentives to entice student participation, and implementation dates and times.

Figure 2. Step Stake Signs

Figure 3. Poster

The team decided to table at six locations across campus with heavy student foot traffic: the library bridge; the fitness center; the student center; a new residential complex; a new dining hall; and a popular walking route between buildings. (See Figure 4.) Tabling was set up from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on the eight weekdays of the 10-day campaign, as it was assumed weekend foot traffic would be low. All six locations were used for the first and last days so that the campaign started and ended strong with high visibility. The six weekdays in the middle rotated between the two most highly trafficked locations. Partnering with the King of Pops stand at the library bridge location on the first and last days added to visibility and incentivized participation. A total of 200 popsicles were handed out, and even in chilly November they ran out within the first hour of tabling.

The task force identified each step required to implement tabling and assigned tasks based on team members' strengths to aid collaboration. The Library Facilities Security Coordinator managed the use of the tables while two Library Specialists coordinated the physical materials needed to conduct tabling and replenished materials once volunteers returned at the end of a shift. Materials included sticky notes and pens to write comments, posters to stick the comments to, easels to hold the posters, candy bowls and candy to thank constituents for participating, slips to enter the gift card drawing, and balloons for added flair and visibility. A Library Specialist sought out volunteers and coordinated scheduling, briefed volunteers on their duties via email at sign-up, and gave quick refreshers when volunteers picked up tabling materials at the main library. Depending on the day, there were 12-15 volunteers to manage.

Figure 4. Poster with Students' Feedback

The task force quickly realized it could not solely rely on its seven already taxed members to table daily for eight weekdays, especially as members were unavailable at times due to other commitments. Spreading the workload was not only a logistical decision, but the task force thought it more effective for student volunteers to be the face of the Libraries in soliciting feedback from peers. While not completely feasible, the goal was to pair at least one Clemson Libraries employee with one student volunteer at each table. At the last meeting before the 10-day campaign began, the team confirmed volunteer schedules. Team members remained flexible to assist where circumstances required, and several stepped up to cover locations that were short-staffed due to volunteer absences.

Online Feedback

The digital feedback opportunities were provided in three ways: blog entries, social media posts, and FlipGrid posts. The task force collaborated with the Clemson Libraries Web Developer to design a "10 Days to Have Your Say" blog, which promoted the posting of conversational feedback with commenting capabilities. The blog also contained a user-generated tag cloud, ground rules, FAQs, Instagram, and FlipGrid widgets. Blog posts were vetted daily by the Libraries Facility Security Coordinator before posting to ensure they complied with the ground rules.

At the time of the initiative, the Clemson Libraries had roughly 1,500 followers on Facebook, 3,500 on Twitter, and 1,300 on Instagram. Despite these numbers, and 897 hits to the blog during the event, the task force found that online submission platforms were the least utilized. Of the 804 total comments, the blog received 35, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter received a combined total of 6, and FlipGrid was not utilized at all. Most comments (763) came from the tabling initiative, but posts received on the blog were the longest and yielded more detailed information. Despite the low level of digital participation, the Marketing Communications Coordinator promoted the initiative to increase the number of Clemson Libraries followers.

Strengths & Weaknesses of the Initiative

Meaningful Results

Within a short, high-stress, two-month time frame, the Campus Feedback Task Force successfully collaborated to complete their charge and collected a total of 804 comments from constituents across campus. The success of the task force is evidenced not only by the number of comments collected, but also by subsequent improvements to the Libraries. This feedback led to the Clemson Libraries purchasing more mobile whiteboards, iPhone and Android chargers for checkout, and office supplies for student use in the building. The largest and most impactful feedback addressed was the shortage of study space. The Libraries added an additional 338 seats in the main library by relocating approximately 140,000 journal volumes off-site.

What Worked Well

The opportunity for constituents to provide feedback both online and face-to-face was one of the strongest designs of the campaign, and tabling was the most successful. The large number of comments received via this method was likely due to several factors. Strategic placement of tables in high traffic areas during busy lunchtime caught the attention of many students, and engaging volunteers and incentives encouraged participation. The combination of library employees and students at the tables was also effective as their range of experiences interacting with the campus population complemented one another. Several student volunteers had experience covering a branch services desk and one of

our Library Specialists tables at university orientations. The diversely talented team of volunteers was invaluable to the campaign.

Though the blog did not receive high feedback numbers, the task force found it extremely useful as a landing page for the campaign. It acted as a public communication avenue to provide contextual information for participants and, at the end of the 10-day period, the task force continued to use it to post updates. Gift card winners were announced, and a summation of the responses was posted. This included visualizations of the data as well as a PDF of all raw data collected. The task force also posted their future plans to respond to the input, which made the Libraries accountable for acting on the feedback received. To help manage the blog, the task force created a LibGuide that acted as internal documentation of the campaign. Several widgets on the LibGuide powered content on the blog site. With this setup, team members could fix widget issues on the LibGuide without relying on the Libraries Web Developer.

The greatest determinant of success was the collaborative and communicative environment fostered by the task force. Members' diverse skills and knowledge, campus connections, and enthusiasm for success all contributed to the high rate of feedback attained. All members of the task force worked together to brainstorm ideas and volunteer time to bring the vision to fruition. The campaign would not have been successful if the team had not collaborated well together and been flexible with their time. That this was a top-down initiative from the Dean was also paramount. With few constraints placed on the project and full administrative support, the task force was provisioned a budget to cover necessary expenses and supervisors approved the shift in focus required by team members working on the initiative, while also encouraging student workers to volunteer for this centralized library project.

Areas for Improvement

An outreach project of this scale required extensive collaboration, and the short timeframe posed several challenges. First, task force members needed to reallocate a large portion of their time to plan and market the project to accommodate existing obligations. Second, it made it difficult to quickly gain buy-in and participation from those outside the task force whose schedules were already filled. Finding, properly training, and scheduling volunteers for each of the 18 tabling shifts proved difficult, which was compounded by the busy time of the semester near mid-term exams, fall break, and the Thanksgiving holiday. As a result, several volunteers backed out at the last minute and training was not always sufficient. Unforeseen inclement weather further limited tabling hours and locations. Task force members made last-minute decisions to move tabling inside the main library or cut tabling hours short on several occasions. While this limited time to collect feedback, it signified the strengths of task force members in making quick decisions as circumstances changed.

The short timeframe also meant the task force had less time to market the campaign and communicate across campus. An extended marketing schedule could have provided additional time to partner with other campus and community groups, promote the blog as a feedback option, and further increase awareness about the campaign. Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook participation and use of the hashtag were lower than expected, which may be indicative of the short timeframe or a need for more aggressive social media promotion. The Marketing Communications Coordinator managed social media marketing with little input from the task force, and this event was held prior to the creation of a social media marketing plan for Clemson Libraries. With more support from the team, social

media could have garnered more campus participation and prove to be a successful method of gathering feedback.

The data collection method also suffered from the short timeframe. For example, a specific feedback prompt was not formulated, so each tabling volunteer used their best judgment to determine questions or statements to solicit feedback. Different prompts were used based on trial and error and what grabbed students' attention. They ranged from, "Tell Clemson Libraries what you think," to "How can we improve? What can the Libraries do better?" The differences in these statements resulted in diverse responses. During data analysis, it became difficult to know to what question each participant was responding. This also meant probing questions were not used. If a student said the library needs more space, there was no follow up to ask, "what kind of space?" to gain specific responses. As research, this process was not rigorous, therefore the results are not generalizable to a larger population. In hindsight, a more rigorous and consistent data collection method would have produced a higher degree of confidence in the feedback collected. Better planning and communication could alleviate these inconsistencies.

Suggestions for Other Libraries

Running this task force successfully hinged on many factors: a hand-picked team of people with diverse skills; a collaborative and supportive spirit; a clear charge and common goal broken into objectives and smaller tasks; strategic use of each member's strengths to assign responsibilities; communication early and often; and identification and reliance on campus partners. Assigning responsibilities based on individual strengths allows each member to take ownership in their tasks and feel empowered to make decisions. Task force members encountered unexpected obstacles during the 10-day

campaign, but with the empowerment of decision-making, they resolved issues efficiently. The task force, as a whole, performed better when each member had a leadership role and did not rely on one person to make every decision.

Soliciting feedback both face-to-face and online was successful because the team understood Clemson students' preferences for in-person interaction and the popularity of social media on campus. We encourage others interested in starting your own campaign to do the same if it fits with your user population's behaviors and needs. If tabling is an avenue you wish to explore, we recommend doing so during multiple times of the day, such as a few hours in the morning, afternoon, and evening, to reach a wider range of constituents. Also, since engagement is crucial, comprehensive training for those staffing the tables may improve their confidence in asking people for feedback. If digital feedback is an avenue you choose, be sure to market each platform as part of the campaign and encourage participation.

Including a student on the task force is essential to gaining representation of and insights into the student population. Our Library Outreach Intern brought thoughtful suggestions as to what might appeal to students, graphic design skills, and a computer science background that helped track, measure, and interpret the feedback data. Involving undergraduates in interesting and fun library initiatives can also increase the pipeline to the profession. Exposing students to meaningful and structured library work, in collaboration with a team of library professionals, allows students to effectively envision themselves working in a library full time. The skills gained from this experience led the student team member to a full-time academic library position.

Conclusion

This article has shown the importance of collaboration within a library task force assigned a project combining the need for proficiency in online and face-to-face campus interactions by examining the composition of the group, and the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative. It provided suggestions for other teams seeking to gather feedback from their communities in a unique way. Task force members saw long term results from this collaboration as the Clemson Libraries made major changes to address participants' feedback. What began as a team of seven employees from across four Libraries departments—a group that had never worked together as a cohesive unit before—ended with strong, trusting, and supportive relationships. These strengthened relationships changed internal work dynamics by building closer ties between units and promoting a larger environment of collaboration and communication across the Clemson Libraries.

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[1] Christopher N. Cox, email message to Task Force, September 21, 2018.

[2] Andrea Peterson and Frank Haulgren, "14 Days to Have Your Say," *Computers in Libraries* 30, no. 3 (April 2010): 29-32, https://cedar.wwu.edu/library_facpubs/64/.

[3] "Clemson University Interactive Factbook," Clemson University, accessed December 20, 2019, https://www.clemson.edu/institutional-effectiveness/oir/factbook/.