

Libraries as Bedrock: Partnering to Promote Diversity and Inclusiveness on Campus

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Abstract

To broaden multicultural learning on campus, the University of the Pacific's University Library partners with Multicultural Affairs to create book displays tailored to cultural heritage months, as well as to events celebrating LGBT and Women's history. The book displays help enhance student identity formation, while also promoting inclusiveness, and have boasted higher than average circulation rates of 20% - 53%. To assist with the promotion of these physical, in-Library book displays, the Library uses the web 2.0 tool, LibraryThing, a robust book-driven, virtual "social space."

Session outcomes: attendees will understand the value of multicultural affairs / library partnerships in promoting cultural understanding (as well as the benefits of student life/ library partnerships generally), will learn how to create and sustain such partnerships and have opportunities to reflect, brainstorm and share ideas regarding library / campus unit partnerships that would promote diversity and inclusiveness at their institutions.

Discussion

Introduction

Given their book resources, academic libraries are in a unique position on campus to be able to highlight the rich historical legacy that grounds and animates present day social justice movements. At the University of the Pacific, the University Library, in partnership with Multicultural Affairs, offers book displays in support of Latino Heritage Month, Native American Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian Pacific Islander Month, GLBTQIA Pride Week, and more.

To assist with the promotion of these physical, in-Library book displays, the Library uses LibraryThing, an online, book-driven, virtual "social space" where people (or institutions) can add books, book-tags, and other information to their own virtual collections. LibraryThing beautifully displays book covers, includes descriptions, reviews and recommendations for further reading, and generally provides patrons with a means of easily browsing thematically-grouped collections in an innovative and stimulating 2.0 environment.

An assessment of the project has revealed the value of thematic book displays created in support of Multicultural Affairs programming and that have both physical and virtual components. These displays circulated at considerably higher rates than average (20% - 53%), particularly compelling given the Library's generally decreasing book circulation statistics over the last four years.

These Library displays help advertise diversity-based campus events programming – the Library is a high-traffic, central location on campus – and additionally help enhance student identity formation while also promoting inclusiveness

and engendering numerous opportunities for Pacific students to make their own discoveries and connections regarding the history of both our nation and our world, thus further equipping them with the knowledge needed to be informed and interculturally competent global citizens.

The partnership described above is one such way that an academic library can partner with student life – a campus unit that, like the library, views its student population in a more integrated manner, and works accordingly to engender whole-person development.

Description

The session provided structured opportunities for attendees to break out into small groups to reflect, brainstorm and then share with the larger group regarding the following questions (responses were captured on poster-boards):

1). Identify one or two ways that your library is already helping to promote diversity and inclusiveness on campus. Small group responses to question #1 included: partnerships with and/or on behalf of international students, transfer students, first-generation students, and under-represented students; identity-based events and exhibits; “one-book” program – shared reading experience for first-year students; high school and larger community outreach (though budget-restrictions have curtailed this some).

2). Brainstorm one or two potential partnerships (including outcomes) between your library and student life (or other campus unit/s) that would further assist with the promotion of diversity and inclusiveness on campus and/or enhance student identity formation. Group responses to question #2 included: partnering with academic departments to highlight collections; partnering with staff diversity training efforts; doing monthly book displays connected with international affairs, making sure to fully leverage the visual strengths of books for display purposes; hosting discussions; working with the office of international students to buy books from students’ countries of origin and setting up displays; purchasing the Ethnic Newswatch database; connecting with student groups and having them create reading lists that are then advertised via LibraryThing; highlighting relevant art on campus and displaying it at the library when possible; partnering with the campus’s public health department to promote health education among African Americans, veterans, etc.; participating in prospective student events; connecting with faculty authors and with campus diversity committees; working with the collection department and other relevant units to engender the procurement of items that would be of interest to multicultural populations as well as to lower socio-economic groups – particularly in terms of DVD procurement; doing outreach to the larger community outside of campus; acquiring Rosetta Stone software to aid with learning and maintaining language skills.

3). Reflect on ways that you might promote the outcomes of such partnerships at your institution – what “media channels” are most effective on your campus? Group responses to question #3 included: Face-to-face interaction with colleagues across campus; participation in campus committees and events; campus television and radio stations; utilizing billboards, display boards, and “e-signs” in library lobby areas; promotion to relevant academic departments via librarian liaisons; utilizing 2.0 tools such as Facebook and Twitter; leveraging campus email lists. The general topic of appropriating new spaces to do displays was also discussed.

Key Points

The session allowed participants to reflect upon and share the work they and their libraries are currently engaged in to promote diversity and inclusiveness on campus, as well as to brainstorm ideas for the future. As can be seen in the above section, a good deal of energy and passion is already being devoted to this topic at many campus libraries, and librarians are eager for new ways to connect with various campus constituencies to help create an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all.

Student life as a natural campus partner in the creation of such an environment was discussed. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Librarians Emily Love and Margaret Burger have noted in the article, "Forging Inroads Between Libraries and Academic, Multicultural and Student Services," that, "Conceptualizing the student on a holistic level, which can encompass their social, psychological and academic needs, provides librarians and student service coordinators with an ideal foundation for collaboration"¹. In another article, "Libraries and Student Affairs, Partners for Student Success," authors Swartz, Carlisle, and Uyeki have extolled the virtues of intra-institutional collaboration where units "successfully pool resources in order to sustain and promote student learning" and they have noted as well that libraries and student affairs professionals operate outside of the curricular structure and are thus particularly well-suited regarding the creation of flexible, dynamic partnership that can advance student learning outside of the classroom ².

A few common themes arose during the session: connection – the paramount importance of sustaining and growing relationships intra-institutionally, whether with student life partners or otherwise, so that the library remains a vital and engaged campus partner, as well as the fact that though 2.0 tools can aid us in making connections, they have not (yet) supplanted the power of face-to-face interaction; challenges – particularly regarding the formation of new partnerships or the maintenance of older ones; and the importance of promotion and marketing of the work being done – intentionally bringing it out of the shadows and into the foreground.

Another common theme was the importance of aligning this work, whenever possible, with an institution's and/or library's mission statement or goals regarding diversity. Such alignment engenders the optimal leveraging of resources and tools, which is particularly vital during fiscally challenging times. Inclusion of the library's work regarding diversity into the campus annual report is of great value in terms of promotion as well as the creation of a fertile environment for future partnerships in this area. The fact that diversity as a concept is not universally defined was discussed, and, in the absence of an institutional diversity statement (or even perhaps with one), striving for clarity regarding what this concept means on a given campus (and in the larger world), is important for success. Diversity **with** integration, the unpacking of white privilege, and the significance of engendering a culture of empathy and solidarity was also discussed.

¹ Love, E., & Edwards, M. B. (2009). Forging inroads between libraries and academic, multicultural and student services. *Reference Services Review*, 37(1), 20-29.

² Swartz, P. S., Carlisle, B. A., & Uyeki, E. C. (2007). Libraries and student affairs: partners for student success. *Reference Services Review*, 35(1), 109-122.