Abstract

The Alfred R. Neumann library at the University of Houston-Clear Lake established a systematic outreach program to faculty and through them to students in 2005. Prior to 2005 liaison activities were conducted, but the new goal was to emphasize the library as services and people, rather than just collections. The librarians were encouraged to meet faculty at campus events, new-faculty orientations and other venues. The liaisons also solicited input from faculty on collection development measures, and provided support for accreditation reviews and new program proposals. Marketing efforts focused on library instruction classes customized to the course work, and one-on-one reference consultations. Subject resource pages were developed for every degree program offered on this campus, so that faculty could direct their students to this convenient gateway. The focus of the library newsletter was changed to target faculty interests, and online tutorials were developed as well.

Keywords: Library liaison, library instruction, online tutorials, collection development, subject resources, auditing courses, faculty resources, liaison services, reference consultations, partnership.

Introduction

The University of Houston-Clear Lake is a relatively young university established in the year 1974, offering upper-level undergraduate and graduate degree programs. At present it has approximately 7,500 students, from the Houston-Galveston area as well as international locations. In Fall 2008, the largest number of international students was from India - 54%. The Neumann Library has a staff of 30, including 15 librarians. It houses more than 483,000 volumes, 2000 active periodical subscriptions, and over 170 online databases. We are very proud of our reputation on campus, as recent surveys rate the library highly for our availability to help, courteousness, and responsiveness.

While liaison activities to help the library communicate better with faculty were conducted prior to 2005, our new Director provided the impetus for more systematic outreach, emphasizing the library as services and people, rather than just collections. Thus, a formal program to standardize the process was implemented in 2005. Most of the liaison duties were borne by the public services librarians because of the nature of the work at the reference desk, and during library instruction classes. Technical services staff had few opportunities to interact with faculty. Library-wide meetings affirmed that this was an appropriate duty for all librarians.

All liaison activities were based on the American Library Association’s guidelines, with a room for innovation. Marketing being an important component of the library’s existence, the aim of the program was to bring an awareness to the campus in general, and the faculty specifically about the resources and services offered by the library for their students and professional development. “Communicating timely, accurate, effective information to faculty is critical to the library’s mission. Liaisons carry out this role by serving as the first point of contact for information about library policies, procedures and services to the teaching faculty, and through them to their students.” (Neumann Library internal document).

Goal

The primary goal of the liaison program was to inform the faculty about our resources, and to help them see librarians as a resource whenever they had information needs. We were tasked with making contacts with faculty in person, and via emails, and telephone calls. We were encouraged to attend as many of the events on campus as our schedules permitted, in order to mingle with faculty, and have the opportunity to meet them away from their departments. As mentioned by Stoddard et al (2006), “Ongoing and effective communication is the lifeblood of a vibrant liaison program.” Of course this works well for those librarians...
who have an aptitude for socialization, but it is harder for the introverts.

Method
UH-Clear Lake has four schools, viz., School of Business, School of Education, School of Human Sciences and Humanities, and School of Science and Computer Engineering. First, a general liaison was appointed to each school, and then librarians were appointed to each specific degree program offered on campus. This resulted in most librarians being responsible for two or three degree programs, although some may have more. Having a liaison toolkit that includes such items as the class schedule, course catalogue, new faculty lists, etc. as described by Macaluso and Petruzzelli (2005) would be the way to approach this vital task. Consideration was given to the interests of the librarians, as well as their collection development specialty, in this assignment of duties. A majority of the group was satisfied with this division of labour.

Training and Support
The library’s management has been very supportive in providing the funds and the time needed for in-house training, and for providing educational opportunities by attending conferences and workshops. This helps the librarian gain knowledge of the faculty member’s discipline, and field of research. Time was given to interact with faculty, and many productive contacts were developed by attending the Teaching-Learning Enhancement Center (TLEC) meetings. Formal and informal meetings between the liaisons have also led to more avenues for enhancing skills. Mutual encouragement and mutual participation are mainstays of the librarians here.

Liaison Activities
The library does not have different levels of service assigned by tiers as described by Ferree et al (2009), at the University of Florida, although it would be helpful to have such a list to guide us. Their tiers are divided into services performed by all liaisons, basic services, discretionary services, and unit-based services. Some of their services are funded by the departments. All our services are library-funded.

Enumerated below are the various activities conducted by liaisons at UHCL.

Reviewing course syllabi
Every semester appeals are sent out to faculty to share their syllabi with library, so that the library can review and purchase the required material for students to complete their assignments.

Result: The library gets mixed responses, as some faculty are diligent about sending them, and others are not.

Library Instruction and Online Tutorials
A marketing campaign was started for our classes customized to each professor’s requirements, and within each class the students were informed about individual one-on-one reference consultations.

Result: A sharp increase in the number of both classes and consultations, with satisfied patrons. For those professors teaching online classes, several online tutorials were developed, and received many positive comments.

Auditing courses
So far two librarians have audited courses in art and international management, during working hours, with support from library management.

Result: The faculty were gratified that the library personnel were taking time to find out what was going on in the classrooms on campus. This stimulated interest not only among the faculty, but the students also, as many of them were oblivious of library holdings, including some textbooks and videos relevant to their courses. This also resulted in creating class handouts and library instruction for the students in different sections taught by the same professor, as well as other professors teaching the same course.

The art faculty had been sending their students to complete assignments to other libraries until then, but when the librarian informed the professor of the vast number of books that had been collected in her discipline, she was surprised and is now one of most avid users of the library, and sends in book order requests frequently.

Facilitate speedy document delivery
When the faculty contact their liaisons for help with research articles, documents or other media, the library initiated the process, and made sure that their requests are fulfilled as quickly as possible, so that the articles are delivered to requestor’s desktop the same day, or the following morning.

Result: Obviously, faculty are thrilled with this speedy response, and don’t hesitate to continue this practice, especially as it is subsidized by the library.

Subject resource pages on UHCL web portal
(http://www.uhcl.edu/library/RESEARCHBYSUBJ SUBJ)

Each degree program offered by this university has a pertinent subject resources page. The subject pages have been organized under four headings. Although this has been standardized, librarians are free to add anything they have determined to be useful to their pages.

Articles & More – is further divided into

- Find Articles- which includes links and how-to guides to all the databases appropriate to the subject.
• Find Electronic Journals- this includes links to open access journals, and the UHCL electronic journals list, etc.
• Conference Papers and Proceedings - has links to Papers First, and Proceedings First, both are provided by OCLC with international coverage.

**Books & E-Books** – has more tabs for
• Subject Headings- selected Library of Congress broad subject headings are listed.
• E-Books- has links to the E-Book databases we have purchased, such as NetLibrary.
• Dissertations & Master’s Thesis- links to databases, including the UHCL thesis catalogue.
• Other Sources- has links to catalogue such as WorldCat, and Books in Print database.
• Almost all the librarians have included bibliographies of books, videos, and other applicable materials.

**Additional Resources** – Includes the following
• Web guides and Search Engines- freely available on the internet.
• Professional Organizations- links to their websites.
• Stock Exchanges and Quotes- for business majors.
• All the subject pages have a lot more information than enumerated above, depending on the degree program and assignments.

**Help**
includes contact information and tips to most commonly asked questions.
Result: Faculty point their students to this gateway into the huge array of material available through the library.

**Faculty Resource page**
http://www.uhcl.edu/library/FACSERVICESPG

Result: As this link gives an overview of all the services library can offer them, it is an effective tool for communication about policies, procedures, and answers to frequently asked questions. Many faculty members have familiarized themselves with this one-stop link.

**Notification of new book and other material additions to collection:** Periodically, library will end out notices of newly acquired material of interest to faculty, along with information on call numbers and availability.
Result: Faculty like knowing that the books they have requested for addition to the collection have indeed been acquired, so that they can then screen them and place them on “Reserve” for students in their classes. This also results in further dialogue.

Department meetings: Much as we would like to be invited to all the department meetings, this does not happen.
Result: We don’t always know of the changes and new directions that the department is heading towards and are in a somewhat untenable position of trying to catch-up.

**Presentations at orientations for new faculty:** Many new acquaintances are made, and liaison relationships begun at orientations.
Result: The new faculty (even those for whom conversing with new people is difficult) feel more comfortable in approaching the library staff with their questions, knowing the warm welcome they will get. Because the library staff cannot all attend the orientations, they also make themselves known to the faculty by informing them of library services and inviting them to meet the library staff.

**Embedded librarian in online course:** One of the librarians was able to obtain the professor’s permission to monitor discussion boards within WebCT and help with library-related questions.
Result: Though there was excitement initially, and the questions were answered promptly, it was a time-consuming task.

**Community partnership with NASA/JSC:** The Apollo archives (from NASA) are now housed in the library, along with UHCL archives. Outreach activities undertaken by the library archivist have been very successful.

The has also developed a partnership with the Johnson Space Center (JSC) which has a large presence in the Clear Lake area. As a space-saving measure at JSC, all the books from JSC library are housed in this library. We have a librarian assigned as liaison to help employees and contractors with their research needs. Many faculty members have collaborations with NASA/JSC staff.
Result: These community engagement measures have resulted in UHCL being awarded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, one of 119 U. S. colleges and universities for its 2008 Community Engagement Classification.

**Results**
Although each librarian approached the task in his or her own way, the outcome was reflected in:
• An increase in the number of Library instruction sessions.
• Increased use of individual Reference appointments.
• More faculty approaching the library staff for help with their research needs.
• Accreditation review, and new program proposal support being provided for all departments.
• New collection development policies and procedures have been implemented, and collection management is more streamlined, with involvement by the faculty.
• A change of library newsletter focus with the consensus decision among librarians that the primary target was faculty. Scholarly resources were highlighted, tied to our knowledge of what faculty are interested in at present.
• The creation of online tutorials and class handouts for many courses.

Some overlap did occur because the library staff are not restricted to their assigned programs. A librarian who was not the liaison, developed a working relationship with a professor, but this issue was resolved by keeping the liaison in the loop. Communication within the library is essential as all the functions in the library departments are interrelated.

The number of faculty contacts we had since the implementation of this program rose. A list of successful tactics was generated, which was helpful in developing strategies. As noted by Reeves et al (2003), “Librarians must be proactive in initiating contact with faculty and staff, and making the invisible visible-letting everyone know the kinds of academic challenges at which librarians excel.”

What works best in establishing rapport?

These are some comments made by the librarians in their internal-to-the-library liaison reports:
• “Quick informal chats and emails work best”
• “I know them by sight and we stop to talk when we meet on or off-campus”
• “All types of contact have worked”
• “Personal contact with the division chair has been very successful”
• “Individual emails and conversations are helpful, in that they remind the faculty of our existence and available services”
• “Personal contact does the best job of establishing rapport”
• “Having frequent opportunities to talk with and email each of the main faculty members has made the library materials needs for this program much easier to meet”
• “I watch for opportunities to attend on-campus presentations by my faculty”
• “The best method of communication for promoting our Liaison Services is via email” (for some individual faculty)
• “Email is an efficient method for broad announcements, but some are deleted unread”
• “Face-to-face is always more satisfying and usually brings a better response”
• “Discussions with professors about the nature of their course offerings has given me valuable input”

This exercise covers a broad spectrum of means by which to establish relationships. As mentioned by Glynn and Wu (2003), we must be patient and creative in developing relationships with faculty.

As the program depends on cooperation among many individuals in the university, liaison program continues to evolve, with innovative means used to network with faculty, even those who are reluctant to communicate with librarians. It is difficult to meet the adjuncts, and professors who teach off-campus, as they do not have offices in the university. So that only leaves us with email, which might or might not be read, due to email inundation. Although this is discouraging, we persist. The introverts among us find strength in numbers – we find colleagues to go with us to campus events. This success also depends on how receptive faculty are to the librarians’ overtures.

Conclusion

Regular communication between the liaison and his or her academic program is the foundation on which the program is built. Liaisons accept responsibility to make them known and available to the faculty. The ways in which such communication takes place varies and there is no established pattern, but face-to-face, on-site contact outside the library is encouraged. Communication may be through an official departmental contact person or departmental library committee, by visits to individual faculty or scheduled, on-site “advising hours,” through printed or electronic communications, by periodic or regular participation in faculty meetings, and by attendance at academic symposia or colloquia.

It is equally important that liaisons communicate effectively within the library, sharing information with colleagues informally or in Liaison Team meetings so that library policies, collections, and services are responsive to the interests and needs of the academic community. Tasks performed by liaisons are interrelated with work performed and managed across library functional areas. Liaisons are expected to exercise initiative in the performance of their work, but also to recognize that library functions are interdependent and need to be coordinated with their colleagues.

So, in conclusion, just as the faculty must “publish or perish,” we librarians must adopt the “liaise or lose” mantra!

References

I have included several interesting articles in the list of references, though I have not cited them specifically.


