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Using Library Events and Programs to Reach Out to Patrons

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In the 2014–2015 academic year, Southwestern Libraries had significant changes in faculty and staff. We decided that our librarians would take the initiative to reach out to the students in order for the library to be more welcoming. Our ultimate goal was to try to get students to see the library as a place of learning and community, and not just a place to pick up books.

Our first program that we tried was a faculty talk, which we called a Library Lunch, on biblical inerrancy. Students registered for the event from a link to Eventbrite that we put on our LibGuide. Eventbrite is a free online tool that allows users to create events and have patrons purchase tickets. We set our tickets to be “sold” for free. In addition, we customized messages in Eventbrite to send students three reminder emails about the event. We have found that the use of an event page on LibGuides with Eventbrite links has been helpful in estimating attendance and reminding patrons about the event.

The first faculty talk was a huge success. This led to future Library Lunches on gender communication, Anabaptists, family worship, child discipleship, and themes in the Old Testament. By offering a variety of topics, we hoped to reach out to different demographics on campus. Our campus bookstore provided books authored by the speakers for our library lunches at a discount for our students to purchase which the authors gladly signed. These lunches facilitated a time where our students could see their professors outside the classroom. Our students had the opportunity to ask professors questions about their fields of study. In one instance, a professor took the opportunity to share how a traumatic event helped increase his faith in the Lord.

Although we found Library Lunch events to be well attended, we did incur a financial cost when those who registered did not attend. We were purchasing boxed lunches for each of the students that registered. For a few of the events we had
several box lunches leftover. In order to make these events more cost efficient, we have decided to transition these Library Lunches into Coffee Talks for the Fall 2016 semester. This fall, we will also invite a PhD student to present on their research.

During the spring of 2015, we also set up thirty-minute instruction sessions in the library that we have named Libinars. In these sessions the professional librarians cover topics such as using the library catalog, ebooks, doctoral resources, RefWorks, and paper formatting. Recently, we have invited our Writing Center director to do sessions on constructing a thesis and grammar. Starting in the fall of 2015, we started offering these sessions simultaneously in face-to-face and online (through Adobe Connect) formats. We offered these sessions in the morning and late afternoon. In the spring of 2016, we started offering these sessions in the evening. Offering these sessions online and in the evening has allowed us to reach a different demographic of students who have been unable to come into the library because of distance or life situations.

In the fall of 2015, we created a new event called Library-Palooza that we did during the week of student orientation. At Library-Palooza, our incoming and current students played games such as mini-golf, bowling, Jenga, Frisbee throwing, ladder ball, paper airplane throwing, and board games. These games were on all three floors of the library in various corners. All students who attended the event were able to go into the major sections of the libraries. Students carried a passport that they had to get stamped at each game station. At the end of the event, students turned in their stamped passports to be entered in a drawing to win a book. Over a hundred students were in attendance. This created a great moment for students and librarians to interact outside of a reference interview. These types of events will hopefully allow students to see the library as belonging to them instead of it being just another building on campus. We will be doing the same event this coming fall with some minor modifications.

During the spring of 2016, we introduced the Personal Librarian Cookie Social. The personal librarian program is a pre-existing service at our library. Each week students receive an email from their personal librarian. In those emails, students are informed on the different library resources and services that are available to students. Students have been encouraged to reach out to their personal librarian if they need any assistance with projects throughout the semester. Last spring, in the first email, we invited our students to come eat cookies with us. This was designed as a time for students to come by and meet their librarian. We had about twenty to thirty students attend the event. At this event, students and librarians were able to put faces to names. Also, some students registered for Libinars, set up reference appointments with librarians, and asked a few questions about online library resources.
Through partnerships with other departments on campus, we have been able to market our events. Our communications department has created graphics for many of these events. In addition, they have regularly promoted us on social media. We have taken the graphics created by our communications department and given them to our AV department, who turns them into scrolling announcements that run on televisions around campus as well as before chapel. Our student life department has partnered with us as well; they made popcorn for our Library-Palooza event. In addition, they gave input on our Coffee Talks and our Libinars for the fall 2016 semester.

We are hopeful that connecting with patrons will continually increase as our library design changes. During the summer of 2016, the campus bookstore was moved into the first floor of the library. There are plans for a coffee shop in the library in the near future. Until the coffee shop is constructed, there will be an espresso machine that will be run out of the bookstore. We are hopeful that these changes will provide avenues for more events and outreach that will bring more traffic into the library.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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