

A New Team, A New Vision: One Library's Adventures in Outreach

By Ashley Clark, Marna Hostetler, and
Katie Loehrlein

Abstract: What can a medium-sized academic library accomplish in terms of campus outreach? The David L. Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana focuses its outreach activities in three major areas: events and promotions, such as Banned Books Week and Blind Date With A Book; dedicated spaces within the library, such as the Information Wall and display cases on each floor; and partnerships between the library and other departments on campus. We hope to reach more students and potential patrons, to help individuals and campus groups feel more comfortable with the library and its staff, and to promote reading as well as increase literacy. This article will detail the library's outreach activities, the creation of a committee to support related goals, outreach, the outreach process, and approaches along with ideas for forming partnerships with other on-campus entities.

Keywords: outreach; committees; library spaces; academic libraries

The University of Southern Indiana (USI) is a public institution located in Evansville, Indiana. Founded in 1965 as a regional campus of Indiana State University, it became independent in 1985 ("History", n.d.). USI's enrollment hovers around 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students, and it offers 80 programs in four colleges – Liberal Arts; Business; Nursing and Health Professions; and Science, Engineering, and Education ("About", n.d.). As of fall 2013, USI employs nearly 700 faculty members (Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment, 2014). USI is a Carnegie Foundation Community Engaged University ("Carnegie Classification, n.d."), with a Division of Outreach and Engagement that offers programs to more than 15,000 participants annually ("About", n.d.). There is a strong emphasis for faculty, staff, and students to be engaged with the community – the USI community, the community of Evansville, and the tri-state region, which encompasses Southwestern Indiana, Southeastern Illinois, and Northwestern Kentucky.

The David L. Rice Library (Rice Library) employs 16 staff members, 10 librarians, approximately 24 part-time student employees, and 8-10 temporary employees. There are four spacious floors with over 200 public-use computers, 30 study rooms, more than 256,000 books, 80 laptops for library usage and 60 iPads for check out.

While we may think of advertising and outreach for libraries as a new idea, the concept was being discussed in the literature more than 100 years ago (Harrison, 1912; Dana, 1910). At that time, librarians were the protectors and keepers of information, allowing access to that information for only a select few. A librarian today is more like a bridge between the public and information. "While [librarians] might focus on specific duties, such as collection development, instruction, cataloging, systems, or borrowing privileges, the real issue is student success" (Mathews, 2009, p. 22). Librarians now focus on users when designing new services and programs to benefit patrons. Instead of the librarian assuming he or she knows what the user needs, librarians begin conversations with patrons and ask them for feedback about services. Libraries today are more often user sensitive and not librarian centered, and part of this shift is a new emphasis on the marketing of library services and resources (Mathews, 2009, p. 2). In recent years, facing competition in the information arena, libraries have certainly stepped up efforts to promote services (Dodsworth, 1998; Carter & Seaman; 2011), and Rice Library is no different.

Although some outreach was being done in previous years, no permanent staff member's time was devoted to such activities. We looked into how other academic libraries approached outreach, and we saw that several had created "outreach" positions but we did not find any literature on academic library outreach committees. Since we did not have the budget for a new position, we created a library committee that would publicize the library and reach out to the campus and community. The creation of a formal committee to support this work allowed the library to expand in new directions.

The Publicity, Outreach, and Marketing Committee (POM) is the largest committee in the library with three staff members, six librarians, and the library's social media intern, a part-time student employee supervised by the Instruction Librarian. Permanent positions on the committee are the Instruction Librarian, Social Media Intern, a representative from Systems for web page input, the staff member in charge of displays in the library, and at least one representative from Administration. Other members rotate on a yearly basis. The committee meets approximately once a month with project subcommittees meeting more often.

Because the POM is so new and large, the group feels empowered to try original things. New program ideas are brought to the group. An assessment is made after each event as to whether to continue with that particular activity. While every library activity is not sponsored by the (POM) Committee, its extensive advertising reach and sheer “people power” is normally utilized to help spread the word about events. Examples of advertising avenues POM has used include elevator signs, the library’s web page, the online student portal, newsletters of other units on campus, such as housing or the student activity planning board, a white board placed in a busy part of the building, display cases within the building, and table tents.

Library-Sponsored Events

Rice Library and the POM Committee have sponsored many new and exciting events over the past two years. Since the library is centrally located on campus, the POM committee knew it would be beneficial to have events that interested the public and that would attract people into the library.

At Welcome Week, an annual campus-wide event, we set up an attractive stand outside the library where employees took turns greeting people and handing out bookmarks which included library information.

Rice Library also participates in *Banned Books Week* in September. During that week, Rice Library and the POM committee celebrate the concept of Freedom to Read by hosting Virtual Read-Outs in which students, professors, and campus administrators choose a passage from their favorite banned or challenged books and record themselves reading. The participants’ readings are posted on the library’s video channel.

POM coordinates Banned Books Week activities to promote reading and literacy. Seeing professors and campus administrators reading from challenged books helps empower students to challenge the status quo and to be more active in their own education and lifelong learning endeavors. The Virtual Read-Out enables this atmosphere to grow. The library helps bridge the gap between teacher and student to strengthen the USI campus community.

Similarly during National Library Week, we asked the university administrators and students to be photographed reading their favorite books in front of a large backdrop poster that said “READ.” Knowing professors’ reading interests helps build community and trust in the teacher-student relationship.

A new activity for the 2013-2014 academic year was observing Halloween. Departments were encouraged to wear costumes that centered on different literary themes. It is likely that students were more conversational with the librarians that day compared to other days. Many times, the costumes broke the ice between a staff member or librarian and patrons. Halloween 2013 also featured a jack-o’-lantern contest.

Employees from the library were invited to carve or decorate

pumpkins in unique ways, and students voted on their favorites.

From mid-January to mid- February 2014, the POM committee hosted Blind Date with a Book, an event in which a few of the committee members chose 75 books that they thought were appealing to students, covered them with craft paper and creative drawings, and wrote bits of information about the books to spark interest. One POM member designed a creative flyer that invited patrons to “spice up” their reading life by going on a blind date with a book and to “risk falling in love with something new!” There were a total of 15 books checked out from this display.

Another new event during the 2013-2014 academic year was the Great Library Scavenger Hunt. The first clue was given out on the library’s Twitter feed and was also posted on a large whiteboard which is usually placed on the first floor of the library in front of the Circulation Counter. Students were asked to find clues placed around the library to assemble the secret message. The clues were placed in locations such as the Reference Collection and the Media Hubs and were designed to educate participants about the library. At the final destination, each student was required to sing the secret message – “I Like Big Books, and I Cannot Lie” - to a staff member to receive a prize. There were a total of 14 participants, and everyone received a book bag, library stationery, buttons, and candy. This event enabled students to learn more about different areas of the library and its services through the clues that were given during the scavenger hunt.

The University Archives and Special Collections (UASC) unit hosted “Movies in the Archives,” which was held once each semester this year. The public is invited to visit and watch newsreels from the UASC collection. The newsreels include footage from World War I, the 1947 World Series, and a boxing match featuring Joe Frazier. The Archives Librarian plans to digitize the newsreels for greater access to the public and campus community. This event attracted people from the Evansville community and we were happy to showcase the services that Rice Library provides to a broader audience.

The POM Committee also sponsors events during Finals Week, such as special activities to help students and faculty to help them feel less stressed. The library has extended hours during this time, remaining open until 2 a.m. every day in the weeks before finals and throughout exams. We give out candy and ear plugs for studying students and our university mascot joins in on the fun. During finals week, we even offered yoga sessions.

Library Spaces

Since the 19th century, libraries of all types have been slowly shifting from buildings that simply provide storage and access to materials to more flexible, user-centered, and “service-rich” activity centers (Latimer, 2011, p. 118). As the noted archi-

lect Geoffrey Freeman has stated, “Students at all levels of academic proficiency need and want to go to the library now more than ever before. Going to the library adds value to their lives and... [t]here is an expectation that the library is the place to be; it is where the action is” (Freeman, 2005, p. 3). With this concept firmly in mind, POM has not only used events and activities to reach the USI community but we have also focused our outreach through library spaces. We attempted to enhance the space within Rice Library so that it would be inviting, informational, and useful for students, faculty, and staff. Students expect access to multiple types of spaces to study – individual vs. group, comfortable vs. formal, quiet vs. social. Our goal is for the library to not only be a building used for study but also a space that gives students the tools they need to succeed at USI.

At the invitation of the library director, USI’s Art Collection Registrar has recently added many pieces of artwork to the library building. The art ranges from traditional paintings large and small to mixed media, drawings, sculpture, and hand-made quilts. The addition of many new pieces recalls the tradition of combining “great libraries, great architecture, and great art” that was common in the world’s earliest and most beautiful libraries (Latimer, p. 113).

Rice Library has also purchased several personal device-charging stations. These are a wonderful way to get students into the library for studying and relaxing. The charging stations are right next to our popular reading and comfortable chairs so that students can read or chat with friends while their devices charge. The charging stations are on the first floor, which is not designated as a quiet floor, allowing students to talk to each other and also library staff. Students have consistently said that the charging stations are one of their favorite parts about the library and want to see more throughout the library building and elsewhere on campus. Students sometimes ask if there are chargers that they can borrow and they are always enthusiastic when shown the charging stations. The word has spread that the library has a place where students can charge their devices and more and more students are coming to the library just to use the stations. While they are in the library, we hope to draw attention to with our services and collections.

We use the Library Information Wall on the first floor as a way to not only give students information but also to pose questions to them. The Information Wall is located in a highly trafficked section of the library, near the checkout desk and the copy machines. We consider their answers and think of ways to enhance their experience. For example, during National Library Week 2014, students wrote down why they loved the library. We learned that students love our study rooms, free movies, friendly librarians, and the quiet places to study. These responses show us where to focus our attention. For example, we know that these spaces are being widely used, but how can we make them better?

On the Information Wall, we also have citation guides, library floor maps, and bookmarks for students to take whenever they need or want. Our goal is to draw students to the Information Wall with fun books and displays, buttons they can take, a ‘poem in your pocket’ and also to give them a place where they can get informational guides to use in their research. The buttons that we place on the Information Wall have proven to be a hit with students. We design and create the buttons in-house, and they always have a literary or library theme. For Banned Books Week 2013, we had about 200 buttons on the Information Wall, and they were all taken. Our outreach goals are extremely important, and we are constantly evaluating ways to make the Information Wall more interactive for students. Adding this interactivity to the Information Wall has also increased the number of books that students take from the wall to check out.

We seek to offer a rotation of interesting displays throughout the library that a POM Committee member assembles. The displays not only reach out to other departments and individuals on campus but they promote library collections and encourage visitors to explore more topics.

A suggestion box has been added at the checkout desk where students can give their feedback on the library in a more formal way. The library director replies via blog posts. Asking for suggestions gives students a chance to share their ideas.

In the past, the Children’s Literature and Curriculum Materials was located on a quiet upper floor with no room to browse. During the summer of 2013, the children’s literature collection was moved closer to the library’s entrance. The collection, which includes curriculum materials, is on low shelves with soft, comfortable seating nearby. We also cleared out a small reading area with rockers for teachers and provided floor pads for the little ones. One of the library’s staff members has experience with early childhood education and has offered story hours several times.

Visits for the Children’s Literature and Curriculum Materials have increased as has the collection’s usage. An unforeseen benefit has been for USI students with children – USI has many non-traditional students - who visit when school is out of session or on snow days. Having the collection there with a place for parents to sit and study nearby has been a welcomed change.

Since students have been asking for individual study rooms and we currently have only group study rooms, plans are currently underway to add 12 one-to-two person study rooms to the top floor of the library. The study rooms will be located where the Children’s Literature and Curriculum Materials were located before being moved to the first floor. These rooms will provide alternatives to the 30 existing group study rooms, which are larger and very popular. We hope that this option will be helpful to those who work best with no distractions. This project is an example of using space formerly used

for collections to provide a flexible alternative for study.

Social Media

Our library has several social media accounts in order to reach students, faculty, and staff, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and a blog. Rice Library does not have a dedicated social media librarian, so the Instructional Services Librarian and a social media intern create posts for the library. Both of these individuals are permanent members on the POM Committee.

Our social media presence is a place where students can ask questions or let us know when someone in the library is being too loud. Students have tweeted staff asking about a variety of topics. One of our ongoing goals with social media is to engage the USI community. We try to proactively give people useful information through social media. We let students know when iPads and group study rooms are available via Twitter, post information about website and content management system outages on Facebook, and we have a study tips-and-tricks board on Pinterest.

Two-way communication is important. Several students posted that they wanted 24/7 library service, and the library director responded with a thoughtful reply. This is a good example of outreach on social media, listening to students, answering questions, and giving them useful information. When analyzing engagement statistics, these posts always have significantly more engagement than all others.

The library also interacts with other departments on their social media channels by reposting their events and important campus information. The USI campus has a page where social media administrators can ask each other to post events or information. We have posted several other departments' events and also asked to have our events posted to their social media pages.

Library staff uses social media to promote reading the library's collection. Every Tuesday we post #booksyoudidnt-knowwehad, which features new books that may be interesting to students, faculty, and staff on our campus. These titles let students know about fun books that they may have had trouble discovering on their own or did not think we would own. We also post photos from our Digital Image Collection for "Throwback Thursdays." These posts always get a lot of interaction from our fans; the students love seeing photos of the library and campus from different time periods. Hopefully when students want to see more photos of the library or campus, they will search our Digital Image Collection or at least know that the library has access to these photos.

Our blog, Let's Talk Library, showcases new databases students can use for their research; new collections at the library; and provides research tips. We want to educate the USI community about collections at the library as well as different resources available to them.

We aim to strike a balance between fun posts and helpful posts and often try to find a way to make a post fun and helpful.

Our social media posts focus on interaction with students and getting them to engage with us. Not only do we want students to see our posts, but we also want them to like, retweet, favorite, re-pin, or interact with them. Our outreach through social media provides students with an informal way to interact with the library and receive information about Rice Library. The biggest challenge we have faced with social media is posting consistently. During the fall semester 2013, the library did not have funding for a social media intern, and only the Instructional Services Librarian and the Head of User Services were posting. This led to intermittent posts, made at times that were convenient for the busy librarians, but not when students were actually looking at our pages. Once we began to post more consistently, our fan base on social media pages grew significantly and so did engagement with these posts.

While not all of our posts are successful, we have started paying more attention to the best times to post. Luckily, Facebook Insights indicates the times of day when our fans are online. For Twitter and Instagram, we have to manually calculate the best times to post. We have done this by looking at the time of day that our most successful posts went up, checking for commonalities across the content of each post, and listing our most successful posts. Tracking our social media statistics lets us know when and what to post.

Partnerships

Beyond the work of the POM Committee, the library has formed key partnerships across campus. Even though an event or activity is not sponsored by POM itself, the resources of the committee are usually called upon to advertise.

The library has a long-held collaboration with the University Division which is responsible for advising, tutoring, and providing supplemental instruction to students with undeclared majors. The University Division established after hours, off-site tutoring at the library in fall 2011. Tutoring on various topics takes place one night a week at the library and the Recreation, Fitness, and Wellness Center. Under consideration is a possible remodeling of library space to provide a permanent location for more tutoring.

The USI Chamber Choir concerts take place twice a year in the library. The performances are free and open to the public. Again, the library uses its extensive social media presence to both prepare patrons for a little extra noise and to advertise the event itself.

Since a new library director came on board in late 2012, some new partnerships have been formed. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) uses the library's small reading room three times each semester as a dedicated space for faculty members to stop by and concentrate on their writing. The CETL likes this program because it offers faculty members a time where they can focus on a specific project and a beautiful, quiet place in which to work. Attendance has been good at each session so far.

Collaborations are important. We have partnered with the Counseling Center which offers many programs throughout the year with some being held at the library. These activities are featured on the library's various social media outlets, and attendance at the screenings far exceed what the Counseling Center was experiencing with other on-campus locations in previous years.

These collaborations increase the visibility of the library, strengthen its position across campus, and bring in visitors to the building. One of POM's stated goals is to increase the comfort level of people visiting the library, and these programs contribute to this goal. Most of these partnerships began with a question to the library director or another library staff member, and the approach has been to give new things a try, assess, retool if necessary, and try again.

In the future, we may experiment with roaming librarians – setting up shop in another on-campus building and offering on-the-spot help. With the children's collection in its new home, we may offer an expanded schedule of story hours, as there is no public library branch nearby. A different type of partnership may include bringing on-campus partners into the building on a permanent basis. Discussions are already taking place for establishing a permanent tutoring space in the basement of the library, allowing the current space in the University Division to be remodeled as a subject-specific center.

Librarians and staff members at the University of Southern Indiana's David L. Rice Library have learned that outreach efforts require time and effort, yet results can be beneficial. We have been surprised and encouraged by how much can be accomplished with teamwork, communication, and commitment. With the knowledge we have gained in recent years – and the new partnerships we have formed – we will continue to explore new ideas, refine successful programs, and reach our community members in meaningful ways.

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