Chapter 12
Grassroots Outreach to Foster a Diverse Community

Elizabeth Ann Ramsey
Boise State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This exploration of an academic library's outreach efforts presents a broad overview of a range of initiatives aimed at fostering interaction with library staff and resources. These efforts are put forth by a variety of contributors from throughout the library's staff without a management mandate or day-to-day control. Although these grassroots outreach efforts cost little to nothing, they still act to effectively inculcate a campus-wide perception of the library as a forward-thinking, inclusive and supportive institution while generating a welcoming atmosphere for diverse users. This atmosphere in turn fosters a learning and research community that sees the library as an important contributor to its success. This chapter describes the foundations for this type of outreach as well as giving examples of a number of innovative methods Albertsons Library at Boise State University uses to provide meaningful opportunities for its users to interact with staff, services and resources in a way that cultivates a feeling of inclusion in the community.

INTRODUCTION

Albertsons Library at Boise State University serves a campus of more than 22,000 students, nearly 2,700 faculty and staff, and the local community, as residents of Idaho state are afforded borrowing and limited computer access at the library. The University currently offers 21 certificate programs, 98 associate and baccalaureate degrees, 82 graduate degrees, and nine doctorate degrees. Although a majority of the student body (79% according to Boise State's Facts & Figures, 2013-2014) hails from largely monoculture Idaho, the demographics on campus are slightly more diverse. According to the 2010 census, the Idaho population was 89% white, while the Boise State campus was 76% white in 2013-2014. Additionally, the campus population is more culturally diverse than the state's; international students make up 3% of the student body, with the majority of those students coming from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Canada, China, India and Nepal. However, that relatively low statistic does not include the refugee population

on campus or other naturalized citizens. Further evidence of diversity on campus might be found in Boise State support programs such as the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), the Center for Multicultural and Educational Opportunities, the Disability Resource Center, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Ally (LGBTQIA) space and events at the Women's Center.

The library at Boise State was dedicated as Albertsons Library in 1995 after Albertsons, Inc. donated six million dollars toward the library expansion. The library staff includes 37 classified and professional staff, 20 tenure track librarians, and student workers in approximately 60 positions. The library's overarching mission is to actively engage in learning, teaching, and research at Boise State University. Towards that mission, Albertsons Library's provides access to resources including: more than 620,000 print books, 119,000 electronic books, and more than 300 databases, with the growth of the electronic collection steadily outstripping that of the print in numbers and cost.

The economic realities of providing access to electronic resources leaves many academic libraries with few funds to allot to outreach efforts. This has certainly been the case for Albertsons Library at Boise State University, which has had no money regularly budgeted for outreach or marketing for years. Also, since about 2006 Albertsons has had little regular programming to speak of and has initiated no print marketing beyond bookmarks and that required by a logo change at Boise State in 2013. Still, through a determined service orientation, active participation at cultural and professional development events, the creation of various no-cost activities and displays, and a creative use of social media, Albertsons Library has positioned itself as a leader in the support of the university research and learning communities.

The library has achieved this position through outreach efforts which are not confined to a committee or other specially designated group. Instead, students, faculty, and classified and professional staff all contribute in a grassroots effort to build community while fostering the library brand as a progressive institution dedicated to supporting the success of diverse users. This chapter will show how this grassroots mode of outreach, while less structured than most standard outreach programs, has been quite successful in connecting to and engaging a community that extends beyond campus.

Although this overview asserts the success of the library's grassroots outreach programs, it must be noted that one drawback to the grassroots outreach activities outlined in this chapter is that its spontaneous nature does not often afford formal assessments. Still, sufficient positive responses have been noted (see Assessments) that Albertsons Library will continue this flexible and responsive form of outreach in addition to contemplating more strategic and measurable methods of outreach and assessment (see Future Directions).

BACKGROUND

In their research Carter & Seaman established a working definition of outreach in two parts: services such as reference, research consultations, library resources and the library space, and promotion of those services (2011). This definition is quite applicable to Albertsons Library, for which outreach encompasses activities in circulation, reference, instruction, collection development and liaison work as well as the more traditional programming and marketing. In other words, for Albertsons Library, outreach is anything that fosters engagement by the community to participate actively in the library.

This wide-ranging definition of outreach may have developed in part through a service orientation that permeates all aspects of librarianship at Albertsons Library. This orientation was articulated in a 2011 panel presentation by library management, *55,000 Ways to Say Yes: Customer Driven Acquisitions*

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