# Chapter 16
# Making Connections, Building Community:
## Applications for Developing Library Allies

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## ABSTRACT

*In 2009, the University of Idaho embarked on an ambitious five year plan to redesign library space and build community through increased programming, intentional partnerships, and student engagement in the design process. Guided by quantitative and qualitative research in the form of LibQual, observational studies, and student surveys, librarians implemented incremental space redesign to create collaborative, inclusive, and community-based environment for social and scholarly pursuits. Librarians found that student-led initiatives were the most successful in building a community of library allies, aligning with the philosophy of the Communicative Commons, but also valued the related opportunities to partner with teaching faculty, student service organizations, and external campus partners. This chapter will seek to provide a balance of theoretical goals with practical steps for implementation, supplemented with examples gleaned from librarians' experiences in community building at the University of Idaho.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the University of Idaho Library (UI Library) embarked on what would become an ambitious five year renovation plan that would incorporate numerous changes to the physical building in the interest of better serving students and patrons. Motivated to provide students with a more user-friendly library experience, librarians resolved to use creative solutions to create a more collaborative, inclusive, and community-based environment for social and scholarly pursuits. After the economic downtown, initial plans for a dramatic renovation were shelved; however, the priority for an engaging space in which to build a library community remained high. After some deliberation, librarians decided to use a two-pronged approach to deliver a user-friendly, student-focused experience. The first approach would be to increase programming to offer more interdisciplinary displays, exhibits, and services to students. Librarians felt

that this could be accomplished with minimal to no funding by leveraging existing campus partnerships and highlighting collections. Second, librarians wished to design a budget-friendly, aesthetically pleasing space that would appeal to students; a recent LibQual survey had assessed the comfort and utility of the first floor as suboptimal and students frequently expressed their desire for additional group study spaces and more comfortable seating areas. Building a strong community of stakeholders to support the library in the uncertain years ahead was critical, and librarians hoped that by creating a more desirable environment through programming and design, community would build organically as use of the building increased. This chapter will seek to provide a balance of theoretical goals with practical steps for implementation, supplemented with examples gleaned from librarians' experiences in community building at the University of Idaho.

## BACKGROUND

Situated among the rolling hills of the Inland Northwest, the University of Idaho serves over 12,000 students, the majority of whom are undergraduates, and is the state's flagship university. Including 1 million volumes with access to over 9 million volumes total through partnership in the Orbis Cascade Alliance, the UI Library, which is the largest in the state, is often the largest library many students will use. This background helps librarians develop outreach activities that focus on reducing library anxiety and increasing student engagement, and a number of initiatives have been developed to accomplish these goals. Library instruction alone consists of seven instruction librarians who are embedded in first year composition courses; in addition to first year instruction, librarians also provide short-term library instruction, personalized research consultations, subject-specific library instruction to liaison areas, and virtual instruction, both synchronously and asynchronously. Instruction is a priority for the UI Library, and increasingly, so is outreach to the larger university and to the community. A number of programs, including the 2009 reorganization of the library liaison program, as well as the 2008 and 2012 Library Strategic Plan initiatives, have highlighted the importance of developing library allies through collaborative partnerships.

To accomplish these goals, librarians focused on increased partnership efforts to provide dynamic programming in an attempt to draw students to the library and build a vibrant community of scholars. In addition to higher gate counts, librarians hoped that additional displays, exhibits, and services would provide opportunities to collaborate with other units on campus, creating a community of allies with teaching faculty and other units throughout the university. Focusing intentionally on collaborative and interdisciplinary partnerships, both on campus and beyond, can provide a helpful framework for community building.

### Partnering With Student Services

The literature abounds with case studies of successful partnerships, and many articles include best practices and recommendations for other libraries. These partnerships include collaborative efforts with other academic units traditionally partnered with libraries on campus, such as technology services or writing centers; (MacWhinnie, 2003; Sullivan, 2010; Accardi, Cordova, & Leeder, 2010). Partnerships with student services are also on the rise, and may involve collaboration with units such as tutoring centers or residence life initiatives (Tenofsky, 2007; Schmidt & Kaufman, 2007; Walter & Eodice, 2007; Love

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