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# Yours, Mine, Ours: A Study of a Successful Academic & Public Library Collaboration

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**Abstract**

This article studies the development of a collaboration between the Bryan + College Station Public Library System (BCSPLS) and Texas A&M University Libraries. Desiring to increase program attendance and add greater value to the local community, the BCSPLS approached the University Libraries to propose collaboration on a variety of events. The successes of the collaborative programs have met the goals of the public library while also increasing Texas A&M's collection visibility and strengthening A&M's ties to the public. The study demonstrates that academic/public library collaborations benefit the participating institutions and add value to the local community.

Keywords: collaboration, public libraries, academic libraries, outreach

## Introduction

In mid-2016, the Bryan + College Station Public Library System (BCSPLS) approached Texas A&M University Libraries to propose collaborating on a summer reading program event. In the eighteen months following the initial collaboration, eight events took place across a variety of subjects and age levels. With these collaborations, the BCSPLS wished to improve program attendance, particularly of adults, increase the system's reputation and visibility, and strengthen ties to both Texas A&M and the local community. The University Libraries saw the partnership as an opportunity to increase community use of their collections and create more accessible spaces in which to display collections and resources. The partnership also needed to speak to the institutions' mission statements, ensuring that internal and external stakeholders would offer support. This study examines how

the success enjoyed by the BCSPLS and Texas A&M University Libraries met the goals of the participating institutions and added value to the Bryan/College Station community.

## Literature Review

We reviewed the existing literature on library collaborations to discern trends in collaborative ventures between different types of libraries. For the purposes of this case study, 'collaboration' and 'partnership' will be used interchangeably, and the scope of research is restricted to libraries within the United States. A search of library collaborations revealed that partnerships seem to occur primarily in three types of pairings: public libraries and non-library community organizations, academic and school (K-12) libraries, and school (K-12) and public libraries. Although the focus of this article is public and academic library partnerships, it is worth noting the variety

of ways in which library collaborations have been formed.

Public Libraries & Non-Library Community Organizations

There are many examples of libraries that have partnered with local community organizations, businesses, or government entities. Frequently, public libraries team up with local economic development centers (such as Small Business Development Centers and Chambers of Commerce), workforce training centers, and government agencies. A survey of Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) in six states (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming) revealed that roughly 50% of the respondents worked with their local public libraries. The reported collaborations included presentations on library resources and referrals to the local library for reference questions.[1] The Harris County Public Library System worked with the Texas Workforce Commission and the nonprofit *SCORE* agency to create small business workshops, a newsletter highlighting collaborative events, and outreach to the small business community.[2] Citigroup Financial Services funded a "Power Up" business development competition at the Brooklyn Public Library, at which startups and small businesses compete for financial awards.[3] Other libraries have chosen to focus on early literacy, such as the San Antonio Public Library, which sends its "Little Read Wagon," of library staff and books to child care providers.[4]

Academic & School (K-12) Libraries

Another common pairing is that between school (K-12) libraries and academic libraries. In 2015, Preddy argued that these pairings are vital to meeting patron needs. The author classified the school (K-12) and academic relationship as those of a practitioner and academician, and posits that collaboration, communication, and cooperation between school and university libraries may be the only way in which, "we will continue to

meet the diverse needs of our community's young people."[5] In addition, Burhanna and Lee Jensen point out the importance of academic library outreach to school (K-12) students as it can ease students' anxiety and also serve as an alternative means of recruitment for colleges and universities.[6]

Other collaborations have focused on enhancing information literacy skills. One project in Illinois looked at both middle and high school students' information literacy levels and worked to develop a program to ensure students at the schools developed a minimum competency level of information literacy skills before graduating.[7] Nichols, Spang, and Padron developed a continuing education course for school librarians/media specialists and in-service workshops on information literacy instruction in school (K-12) libraries.[8]

School (K-12) & Public Libraries

School (K-12) and public libraries have found success partnering in projects intended to increase literacy, pool limited resources, and increase the overall utilization of both the libraries and their programs. New York in particular has several examples of such collaborations, including the MyLibraryNYC initiative, which involved the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and the New York City Department of Education.[9] This collaboration allowed students and teachers to search a multi-library catalog from any internet-connected computer. The Connecting Libraries and Schools Project (CLASP), based in NYC and also involving the New York Public Library, targeted students in grades K-8, reaching over 120,000 students.[10] Some of the CLASP initiatives were adopted widely, such as collaboratively creating summer reading lists, or hosting Open School Nights in which public librarians could interact with students and teachers.

In Tennessee, the Nashville Public Library and Metro Nashville Public Schools created 'Limitless Libraries.'[11] A pilot project began in 2009 with the goal of sharing both physical and digital resources seamlessly between the public schools and public library via a courier service. By the 2015 school year the Limitless Libraries resources were available to all 3-12 grade students in Nashville public schools, and 88,000 students were signed up for a public library card.

Public & Academic Libraries

However, examples of partnerships between academic/university libraries and public libraries were not easily discoverable. Our findings indicated that when public and academic library collaborations did occur, they tended to follow one of two templates. The first commonality we discovered was the prevalence of collaborations focused on the subjects of health or law. Engeszer et. al. describe a four-year project between two academic organizations and a public library to provide health information to citizens in St. Louis, Missouri.[12] The program included training public librarians on health resources, installing information kiosks with handouts, and running a lecture series on health related topics. Spang and Baker focused on health information literacy and public and academic library partnerships in delivering resources, reference services, and training in a state-wide survey of Michigan.[13] In their findings, they identified a need for public and academic libraries to work together in increasing health information literacy. Through collaboration libraries would be able to co-develop collections and provide specialized reference services based on employee skills and knowledge, making the libraries a vital and primary source for health information.

We also noted that of the collaborative ventures that were not focused on improving health or law information literacy, the majority were one-off or short-term events. Most examples reported within the scope of academic/public library partnerships indicated that these events were not recurring or long-term. Knipp, Walker, Durney, and Perez offer a review of the Anime and Comics Enthusiasts Convention (ACEcon), a two-day event created by St. Petersburg College and the Palm Harbor Library.[14] They indicate that the event made the participants more likely to collaborate in the future but did not offer any examples of what those collaborations might be.

A surprising finding during the course of this research was the relatively small number of partnership examples involving recurring events and/or projects that involved local culture, small business development, or the sharing of historical or archival holdings. The presence of so many law- and medical-related information literacy initiatives was not altogether surprising, but the fact that they were the dominant examples in academic/public libraries was unexpected. While no research was found that explores why there is less engagement between academic and public libraries, we posit that two potential reasons for the low number of partnerships are a hesitation to reach out on the part of public librarians, and academic librarians' focus on research and instruction rather than program development.

There are exceptions to the two dominant trends. The San Jose Public Library and San Jose State University (SJSU) collaborated to create a joint library space in 2003, where services, resources, and spaces are available to SJSU faculty and students as well as citizens of San Jose.[15] Cisse describes a successful resume resources partnership between the Public Library Services department and Alvin Sherman Library Research and Information Technology Center, both located in a joint-use facility open to the public and used by Nova Southeastern University.[16] Rogers-Whitehead, Rutledge, and Reed touch on

their Accessible Tutorials Utah, a project involving accessible technologies, which assist students with disabilities, that was created through Innovative Librarians Explore, Apply, and Discover-Utah (ILEAD Utah) and supported by a partnership between Salt Lake County Libraries and the University of Utah.[17] The University of North Texas partnered with their local library to allow wider public access to government documents from the federal depository program[18] and the University of Maryland promoted and customized MedlinePlus for health information to be utilized by the local community.[19]

Beneficial Collaborations

Literature supports the argument that library collaborations have many advantages, with previous researchers finding that partnering benefits community health and legal literacy, increases library foot traffic, and strengthens community ties. Libraries that band together in consortia can also place themselves in a better bargaining position with vendors and publishers, or assist each other with difficult cataloging problems.

The ability to pool resources, including personnel, money, and physical spaces, is frequently cited as a main benefit to the creation of library partnerships. In 2002, Breeding described the benefits resulting from implementing multi-library catalogs, a project which increased library efficiency and made a wider variety of resources available to patrons.[20] Describing a partnership that combined law and public libraries, Thomas noted that the collaboration improved access to legal materials and decreased the number of places a patron had to visit to attain information.[21] Special libraries, with their unique problems and collections, can benefit greatly from increased collaboration and connections with their colleagues. For example, special libraries could pull in help on tasks such as cataloging a particularly difficult resource.[22] Collaborations run the gamut between simply sharing

cataloging records to actually occupying the same physical space. An integrated partnership between Creeds Elementary School and the Pungo-Blackwater Public Library, located in Virginia Beach, was positioned as "essential to the success and vitality of th[e] small rural library," with a heavy emphasis on how sharing resources allows both the school and public to stretch a limited budget and staff.[23]

While much has been written about collaborations between different types of libraries, there is a lack of literature on long-term collaborative programming between public and academic libraries. This study adds to the literature as a case for creating ongoing partnerships between public and academic libraries, provides examples of programming, and offers advice on forming a successful collaboration. As noted above, a collaboration between a public and academic library is beneficial to both organizations, and programming activities are a low-stakes avenue for starting and growing these partnerships.

**Goals**

Increasing Attendance

Pre-collaboration, existing adult programming events at the Larry J. Ringer (College Station) branch of BCSPLS included Adult Coloring and Adult Crafts, both of which typically had good attendance numbers but only attracted a small section of the library's service population. Feedback from patrons indicated a frustration on the part of older men that there were no programs that particularly interested them. The aging Baby Boomer generation is creating a large population of active older adults, with their needs largely ignored by public libraries, and the BCSPLS was no exception to this trend.[24] In order to meet this need, the public library decided to increase its focus on adult programming, specifically in subjects outside arts & crafts. In doing so, they recognized the value of pairing up

with a larger entity that could provide speakers or resources unavailable at the system.

For the University Libraries, a statistic to be improved by means of these collaborations was community use of academic library services and collections. Multiple studies have shown that more than 90% of academic libraries provide some form of access to their services and collections to community users.[25] The Texas A&M University Libraries provides community members access to their collection through purchasing a library card for $15.00 a year or for free through the TexShare program, a consortium of 675 Texas libraries that allows members to borrow materials across libraries.[26] The library boasts a large and diverse collection of books, journals, and media of potential interest to community users. With a low-cost barrier to access and world class collections, high use by community members of the university collection would be expected, however there are only 84 registered community user/TexShare accounts, with only 25 of those accounts having material checked out at the time of publication. There has not been a formal effort to investigate low community use of the University Libraries, but there are assumptions as to why the Libraries do not see heavier community use - including no free parking at the library, a lack of outreach to the community, and community perception of the library's collections and services as being for academic research only. The University Libraries hoped that increased participation in local community events would lead to a larger number of community users.

Improving Reputation and Visibility

Historically, BCSPLS has experienced minimal media exposure. Prior years' media visibility included short spots on local radio and articles in local newspapers that were printed after the event occurred. Enhancing the visibility and reputation of a public library can be complex. To many in the community, public libraries exist in the background, perhaps only becoming newsworthy for such negative events as when a book is challenged or a budget is cut. In addition, public libraries tend to have small, if not nonexistent marketing budgets, or are uninterested in marketing efforts.[27] The BCSPLS hoped that partnering with the University Libraries would allow for more widespread and higher quality marketing of programs and could raise the system's reputation with the inclusion of prominent faculty members.

Adding Value to the Community

The benefits of library collaboration can be linked to the value of libraries, especially that of public libraries. Published research encourages connections between libraries, arguing that by helping each other, the libraries can strengthen the local economy and community.[28] Public libraries are an underappreciated element in the development of educated and productive communities. The materials offered freely at public libraries assist in increasing a community's education and knowledge, which in turn promotes economic growth and productivity.

Both the BCSPLS and the University Libraries were interested in improving ties with and adding value to the local community. The Larry J. Ringer Library, where these collaborative programs took place, is slated to expand in a renovation that will add 50% more square footage to the library's footprint, including a meeting room roughly triple the size of the current one.  This renovation and its accompanying costs will bring increased scrutiny as to the value created by BCSPLS. The need to prove the libraries' worth prompted the public library to hypothesize that in order to begin attracting a larger and more diverse percentage of the populace to the library, BCSPLS would need to offer collections, events, or services that could not be obtained elsewhere.  The public libraries' budget and staffing levels did not allow for special collections, or subject specific programming, but a

partnership with Texas A&M University Libraries was seen as a way to share resources and collections for the benefit of the community.

As noted above, the University Libraries offer the option of a community use card, but usage of this service has historically been very low. By collaborating with BCSPLS, the University Libraries hoped they could improve relations with the local community, positing that joint events could help with library anxiety by introducing an academic library to children and young adults before they enter college. Library anxiety, a term introduced in 1986 to describe "the negative and uncomfortable feelings experienced by many university students when using, or contemplating using, the academic library,"[29] can be a significant barrier to student achievement. Research examining library anxiety points out that college students need to feel comfortable and welcome in a library in order to use it effectively.[30] Texas A&M University has an imposing library system, with five branches and over 5 million volumes.[31] If these collaborative programs can position the academic library as a welcoming, engaging, and useful space, they can help prepare local students to have a productive and valuable relationship with their future academic library.

**The Libraries and Their Missions**

Although we were primarily focused on making improvements in meeting the above objectives, the partnering institutions also needed the collaboration to clearly align with the values and vision of both libraries in order to receive more enthusiastic buy in from administration, and provide a starting point for proving the success of the partnerships to internal and external stakeholders.

The University Libraries makes their vision, mission, and values statements available through their website. The vision statement reads:

The University Libraries will be the indispensable hub of discovery, learning & creativity at Texas A&M University.[32]

The actions and resources the library outlines to meet this vision include a "distinguished collection of information resources," "robust services," "team[s] exceeding customer expectations," "an inspirational environment," and a culture that is built on "trust, openness to risk and strengthened by its collaboration and diversity."[33] It is clear through these statements that the library is focused on the relationship between the library and its patrons, the collections held, and internal culture. Collaboration is the first concept listed in the Libraries' organizational shared values, a guiding set of ideals developed by library employees for shaping the organizational culture.

The BCSPLS Mission Statement is also available on their website. The mission states:

> The Bryan + College Station Public Library System provides equal opportunity access to information, high quality book and multimedia materials, programs, exhibits, and online resources to meet the needs of a diverse community for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment and intellectual stimulation.[34]

The BCSPLS mission statement emphasizes that public libraries are for everyone. Whether through equal access to materials or programs for all ages, the library is focused on adding value to the diverse community of Bryan/College Station.

Setting

The cities of Bryan and College Station, Texas form a rapidly growing community located in Central Texas, roughly in the middle of a triangle formed by Austin, Dallas, and Houston. In 2010 the cities shared a combined population of 170,058 residents; by 2016 the population had

grown 12.9% to 195,058 residents.[35] This rapid growth has earned the community the title of fastest growing non-suburb in Texas. College Station is also home to Texas A&M University, which, in Fall 2017, had a student enrollment of 66,403.[36]

The Texas A&M University Libraries has five library facilities on the College Station campus: three focus on specific subject areas (Political Sciences and Economics Library, Medical Sciences Library, and West Campus Library, which serves the business school), the fourth serves as special collections (Cushing Memorial Library & Archives), and the fifth collects broadly across subject areas (Sterling C. Evans Library). The University Libraries are ranked 8th among U.S. public universities libraries by the Association of Research Libraries.[37] The library holds more than 5.6 million volumes, 1.7 million eBooks, 128 thousand unique journal titles, 6.4 million microforms, and 1.7 thousand databases.[38]

The Bryan + College Station Public Library System consists of three library facilities. Two branches, Larry J. Ringer Library (College Station) and Clara B. Mounce Public Library (Bryan), serve the public with broad collections and programs for all ages. The third branch, Carnegie History Center, is a research center in Bryan with reference materials on local history and genealogy. Library cards, renewable every year, are available for free to residents of the county. The libraries provide Wi-Fi, public computers, programming, and events for all age groups, and popular books and media.

The scope and audience of these two library institutions can be examined within the confines of their mission statements. The University Libraries' Vision Statement emphasizes the centrality of the libraries within the larger Texas A&M system. While the intended audience of the University Libraries are not explicitly stated, the phrasing of the Vision Statement makes it clear the emphasis is on members of the campus

community. The BCSPLS mission statement, in contrast, makes a point of stressing its ties to the community. In addition, as the mission states, the collections and services of BCSPLS are intended for lifelong learning, which indicates the scope can be perceived as the entire population, from birth to old age.

**Collaborative Activities**

Imaginary Maps Collection

The initial collaborative event between BCSPLS and the University Libraries took place during the 2016 Summer Reading Program. Ringer Library reached out to faculty at Cushing Memorial Library & Archives after becoming aware of a special collection of maps. The two participating academic librarians were in the process of developing an exhibit entitled "Worlds Imagined: The Maps of Imaginary Places Collection." This unique collection includes literary, gaming, movie, and other types of fantastical or imaginative maps. The public librarians hoped that exhibiting a small selection of this collection would increase attendance to their 'Aggie Scavenger Hunt,' in which attendees were invited to complete a scavenger hunt that took place throughout the library stacks. After successfully completing the scavenger hunt, the attendees would be invited to view the maps exhibit in the meeting room. Maps were laid out on tables, with the curating librarians available for questions (see Figure 1). This event required a moderate amount of prior planning, including ensuring secure transportation of the maps between the Cushing and Ringer Libraries, creating a navigable and welcoming space in the Ringer meeting room, and securing approval from both institutions.

**Figure 1: Imaginary Maps Collection on display at the Larry J. Ringer Library.**



Edible Books Festival

The Edible Books Festival is a yearly event at Texas A&M University Libraries where participants are invited to create an edible version of their favorite literary characters, plots, books, etc. Due to a renovation project, the University Libraries approached the public library system to propose hosting the event at Larry J. Ringer Library. This was the first event in this collaboration series where a program shifted from the academic to the public library, and as such, it required a more involved level of organization and planning. The typical A&M Edible Books Festival is a huge event that overtakes the entire first floor of Sterling C. Evans Library, but at Ringer, it had to fit into a moderately sized meeting room. In addition, the budget had to be

significantly pared down; the BCSPLS was unable to contribute significate funds because their programming budget had already been encumbered for the year, while the University Libraries saw a system mandated budget cut that lead to a reduced programming budget.[39] As a nod to the new location and patron base, an interactive component was created: patrons could use library-supplied "construction materials" to create an Edible Books entry on the spot (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Families participate in the Edible Book Festival, an event partnered with Texas A&M University Libraries held on April 1, 2017.**



World War I Lecture Series

2017 marked the centennial of the United States' entrance into World War I. The BCSPLS saw an opportunity to create adult programming centered on WWI-related subjects, which in theory would attract the older male population that felt neglected by the libraries' program offerings. The public library once again reached out to Cushing Memorial Library & Archives to provide speakers for a lecture series focused on the centennial. Also brought in for the project was the local World War I Centennial Committee, which had been promoting oral histories and preservation of photographs/documents from

the period. The final lineup of the three-part lecture series included two faculty members from Cushing Memorial Library & Archives. Lecturers were asked to present in a one-hour slot, with time afterwards for questions and examination of any artifacts. All lecturers brought materials that could be handled by the attendees, such as maps and genealogical texts. Events took place on two Saturdays in October, and one Saturday in December. A representative from the City of College Station's Marketing department was contacted and asked to record the lectures, which were then posted to the City of College Station's YouTube channel and also aired on local access television (see Figure 3).[40]

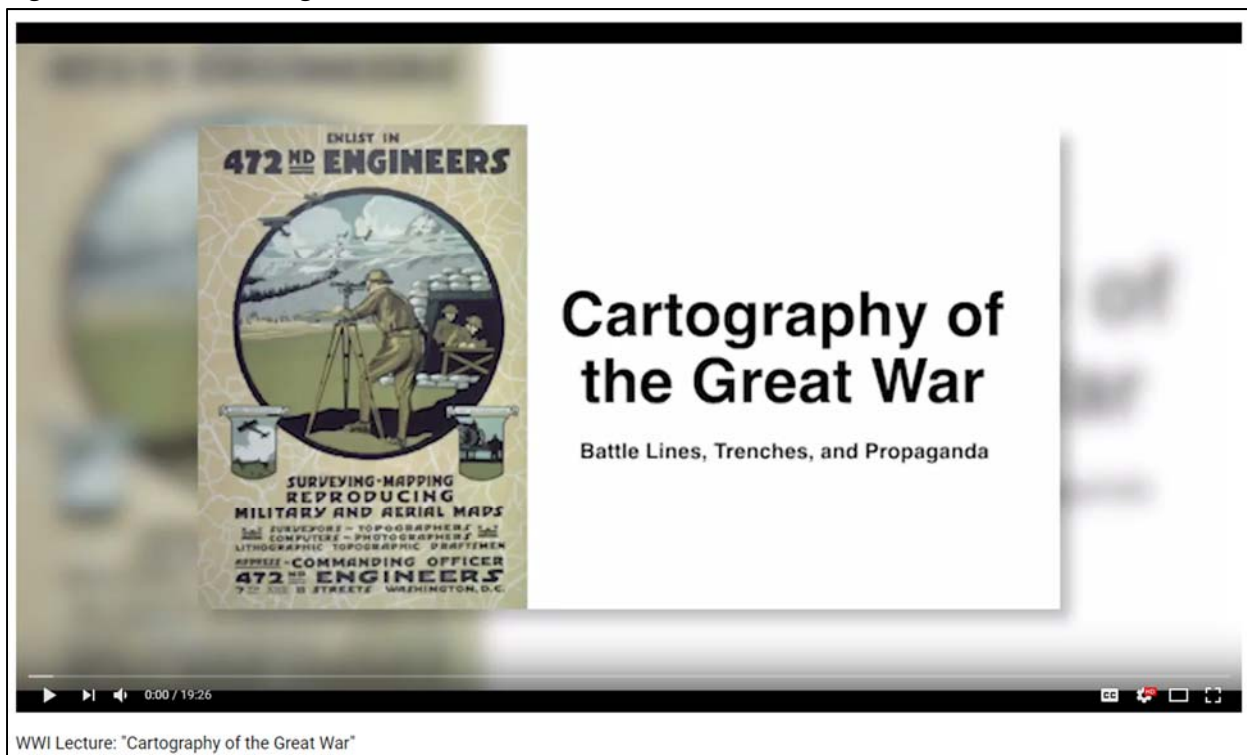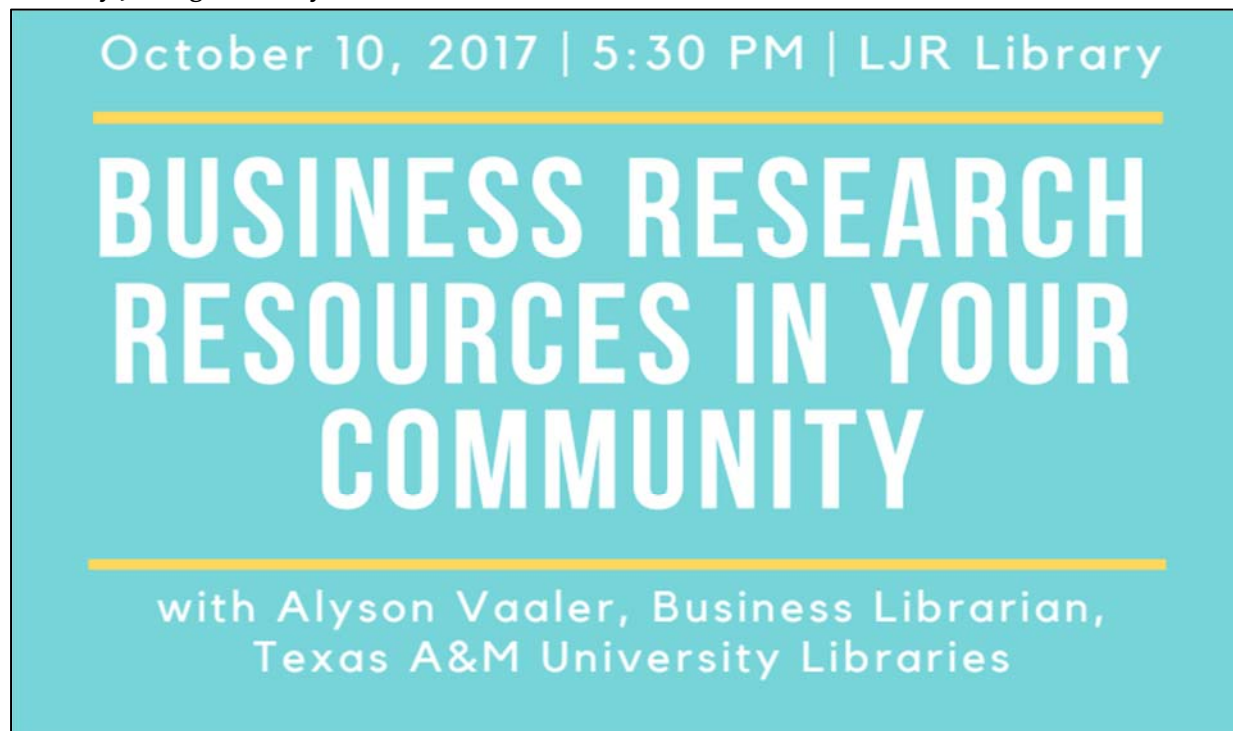**Figure 3: Video recording of first installment in the World War I Lecture Series hosted on YouTube.**



**Figure 4: Social media advertising for the Business Research Resources in Your Community event at the Larry J. Ringer Library.**

Small Business Resources

College Station is home to not only a large university, but a large number of entrepreneurs. Faculty and students at Texas A&M have access to the West Campus Library, Startup Aggieland, and the Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship, all of which have staff and resources geared towards small business development. Seeing a need to increase local, public support for entrepreneurs who may not be attached to the university, the public library reached out to West Campus Library at Texas A&M to invite a business librarian to present on resources available to the general public. This program was a first step towards improving access to resources entrepreneurs need (see Figure 4). The program, entitled "Business Research Resources in Your Community," was also intended to appeal to a wider audience than the existing patron base. Similar to the World War I Lecture Series, the goal was to reach patrons who may not have attended previous adult programs.

Marketing & Budget

Successful marketing of these events was important to both parties, with BCSPLS providing the bulk of social media coverage and the creation of marketing materials. Social media proved to be a good way to target parents with children for events. Using Facebook, events were created which let people RSVP and share the event with their friends. In addition, having events appear on both community and library activity calendars, having handouts at the entrance to the library and at service desks, and, for large scale events, appearing on local media helped spread the word. Also successful was word-of-mouth sharing of the event: people who attended one event would tell their friends, family, and coworkers about it, thus increasing attendance at future events. We also invited the City of College Station's broadcast video specialist to record the lecture series. The recordings were posted to the City of College Station's YouTube

channel and were played on the local television station.

The events also needed to be marketed thoughtfully. It needed to be clear in the marketing that each event was a collaboration, while also highlighting each party involved. This was important for both parties when reporting back to their organizations about the work they were doing. When creating advertising it was important to design pieces that featured logos, names, and titles of all parties involved.

An important part of planning for the collaborative events was to discuss the budget. While this can be an uncomfortable conversation it was vital that the discussion took place early in the event planning process. Although both library systems had limited resources available to utilize during the collaboration, the University Libraries had more to work with - whether that be money, physical resources, or personnel to help staff the events. However, it was essential not to make assumptions as to the level of monetary or personnel support that each partner could provide. Establishing a budget from the start made it clear what resources were available to use and allowed for time and expenditure planning. Working collaboratively has been cost effective for both parties. The majority of the collaborative events have been low budget individually, but each event added up and would have placed a burden on the individual libraries if undertaken without a partner.

**Assessment**

Attendance data for activities held at BCSPLS was gathered via clicker counts, sign in sheets, or head counts. During collaboration activities, these methods along with our observations provided pertinent data for this study. Attendance data, along with reference interactions and circulation numbers, is compiled into a yearly report by BCSPLS. The 2017 report was used to

compare adult and youth program statistics pre- and post- collaboration.

Increased Attendance

Attendance numbers varied from one event to another, with youth-focused or all ages events bringing in the largest groups. The initial collaboration, at which the Imaginary Maps Collection was exhibited, was the largest event, bringing in 145 attendees. The Edible Books Festival also proved popular, with over 140 adult and youth attendees. 41 entries were submitted, with the majority being off the cuff creations at the 'build your own' station. Attendance at the World War I lecture series was higher than average for weekend adult programs. The first event, an exploration of cartography in WWI, drew ten attendees, the second, a lecture exploring genealogy resources, was attended by six, and the third, focused on Texas A&M student involvement in WWI, was attended by eight. In addition, the gender breakdown of attendees of the WWI lectures was much more equally split than

has been the case in past adult programs, with nearly 50% male attendance. The only collaboration that did not draw high numbers was the Small Business seminar. The poor attendance may have been due to a full local events calendar on the day of the presentation, and a failure to adequately market the event in the appropriate arenas.

A yearly report is compiled by the BCSPLS for the Larry J. Ringer Library, and includes statistics on program attendance, circulation numbers, and budget. Previous years' adult programming numbers were mostly attributed to monthly programs such as Adult Crafts and/or Adult Coloring. However, the Larry J. Ringer Library FY17 Year End Report, which included several collaborative events, showed a dramatic uptick in adult program attendance. The 2016 adult program attendance total was 810, in 2017 the adult program attendance saw a 60% increase with a total of 1,297 attendees (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Chart comparing attendance at adult programs in FY2016 and FY2017.**[41]
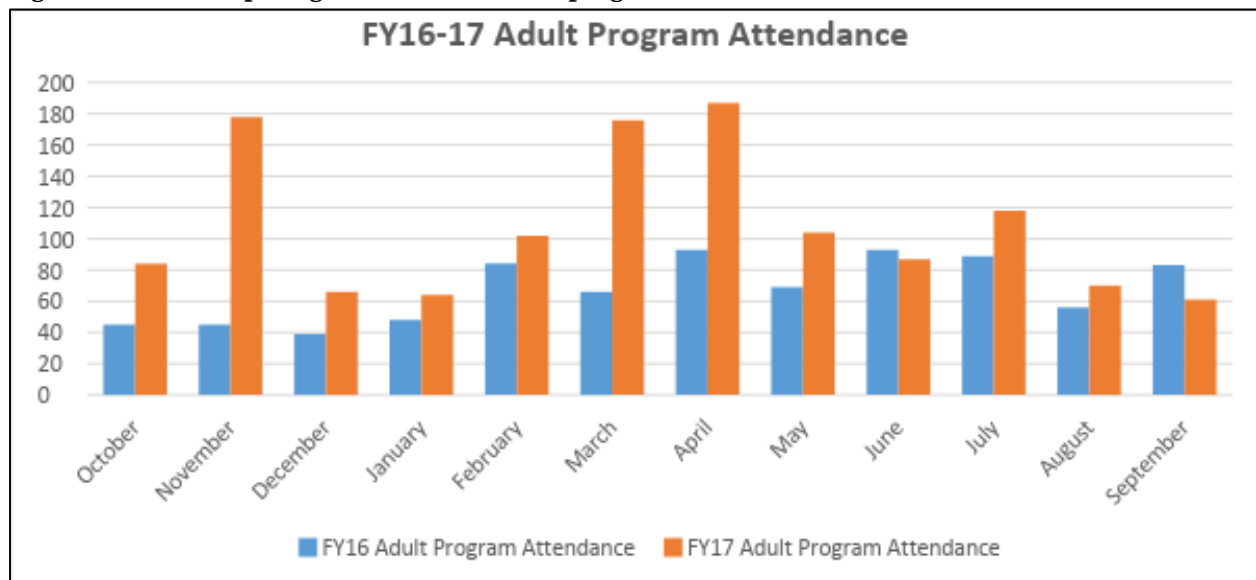
## Expanded Visibility

Thanks to the Edible Books Festival having historically been a large and prominent event at the University Libraries, the academic librarians were able to secure promotional spots on local morning news channels and have post-event write-ups featured in local newspapers. As a result of this marketing effort, the public librarians made new connections with local media and are now more comfortable reaching out to ask for event coverage. In addition, the City of College Station was enthusiastic about the opportunity to record the World War I lectures. The recordings of the lectures, posted on YouTube and aired on a local access channel, have allowed for a larger audience to access the information and become interested in future programming at both the public and academic libraries. Together, at the time of submission, the three videos have been viewed 89 times on YouTube.

## Added Community Value

Based on observations during the events and conversations with attendees, the collaboration added value to the community by exhibiting new resources, sharing knowledge, and introducing the academic library to a wider swath of the Bryan/College Station population. The World War I lecture series taught attendees about genealogical databases available at the public library system, a resource many were not previously aware of. The lecture series, along with the Small Business Resources seminar, allowed the University Libraries to connect with their local community in new and more effective ways.

Attendees at the Aggie Scavenger Hunt event commented on how much they enjoyed being able to get up and close and personal with the maps. Feedback received during the event indicated that many of the attendees were not aware of special collections libraries, or if they were,

were surprised and pleased by the ability to handle an academic library's exhibit.

## Discussion

### Limitations

This study focused on a successful series of collaborations between a small public library system (BCSPLS) and a large research university library (Texas A&M University Libraries) held between June 2016 and December 2017. We note that further research could investigate results from larger public systems and/or smaller universities. All events took place at the Larry J. Ringer (College Station) branch of BCSPLS. It is possible that holding events at the Clara B. Mounce (Bryan) branch would have had different results. A focused effort has not yet made by the Texas A&M University Libraries to assess if the collaborative efforts produced an increase in community use of the Libraries. As one of the goals was to introduce school-age children to the academic library and potentially decrease library anxiety, the effects of this collaboration may not be evident in the short-term. However, anecdotal evidence showed an increase in the requests for genealogical research assistance by community members. This study is also limited by time, with the collaborative events in question having taken place over 18 months. It should finally be noted that although the administration at the public library fully supported the endeavors, the bulk of the collaborations were initiated and/or conducted by only a small percentage of librarians. In public libraries where either programming is dictated from a central branch or where there are only general librarians rather than youth, adult, etc., librarians may not be as free to initiate and maintain collaborations.

### Analysis

As the findings show, both the academic and public libraries were able to meet or exceed the

results they hoped for. This partnership, formed between a small public library and large university library, has been and continues to be beneficial to both parties. Through these collaborative activities, each library was able to connect with new audiences, providing both sides with the opportunity to highlight collections and services, gain new users, and deepen impact on the community. The increased attendance numbers along with the added media and marketing coverage show that a successful academic/public collaboration is not only possible, but should be encouraged.

The University Libraries also achieved their goal of becoming more welcoming and less intimidating to the local community. Many patrons who attended the Aggie Scavenger Hunt commented on the uniqueness of the event and appreciated the kid-friendly approach to special collections. Being able to handle the maps made it more interactive for the younger children and the setting was much less intimidating than a library such as Cushing Memorial Library & Archives. As with the Scavenger Hunt, the interactive aspect of the World War I lectures has proved very popular, with most patrons staying late to ask questions and explore the artifacts and genealogical resources.

The collaborations also met the public libraries' goal of becoming more visible in the community. Media coverage of early events sparked interest amongst the public librarians in increasing their social media presence and ensuring all events were represented and promoted, especially on Facebook. This development tells us that not only were the libraries successful in their collaboration visibility, but such success can inspire more proactive efforts to communicate upcoming events to the public.

Although we anticipated the need to use their respective mission statements to engender support and enthusiasm, it became clear that at least

within the academic library, librarians and administrators were more motivated by a desire to increase faculty impact through service to the community. At tenure granting institutions, participation in these collaborative efforts is a high-impact form of service they can include in their annual review. Through the duration of the partnership the faculty librarians formed connections with non-academic librarians, increased the outreach of their library, and directly interacted with the local community outside of their university campus. At these events participating academic librarians interacted with anywhere from six to 145 community members, many of whom they would not otherwise have contact with, while participating in creative and fun activities. These events were excellent opportunities to advertise collections, services, and events at the academic library and the relevancy of them to the community. The academic librarians could then take their individual results and actions back to the academic library to show how their actions impacted the community and benefitted the University Libraries. This result should not be underestimated. It offers a way for public librarians to frame their inquiries to academic libraries and gives academic librarians concrete reasons to participate.

**Conclusion**

The partnership between the Bryan + College Station Public Library System and Texas A&M University Libraries continues to grow. A second scavenger hunt exhibiting the Maps of Imaginary Places Collection is planned for the 2018 Summer Reading Program. The two organizations continue to discuss future program ideas, including more small business resources events, staffing booths at each other's Open Houses, or joining forces on outreach to underserved groups in the community. For future events, marketing goals include targeting specific audiences by continuing to utilize proven marketing

tools, while exploring new ideas to bring in underrepresented populations.

Each collaborative event between the public and academic libraries built on previous successes and learning experiences. As the relationship between Texas A&M University Libraries and the Bryan + College Station Public Library System gained traction, it became increasingly straightforward to identify and secure future collaboration partners. The participating academic librarians have responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to share their knowledge and provide service to the community, while the public library continues to enjoy increased visibility and higher attendance numbers.

Collaborations between public and academic libraries are not common. Reasons for the disconnect between academic and public librarians is beyond the scope of this study. Future research could examine the perceptions librarians have towards other types of libraries and librarians. However, the benefits of such partnerships cannot be overstated. The positive effects on both

systems, and the impact made on the community, present a strong case for initiating a conversation with the library next door.

*Note:*

Prior to January 10, 2018, Jennifer Wilhelm was the Adult Reference Librarian at the Larry J. Ringer Public Library.

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