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Librarians Are in the House!
Unconventional Strategies for Outreach to Your Campus Community

Laura Barrett and Katie Harding*

Background

Academic libraries are experienced in building relationships with academic departments and have a long history of integration of courses and orientations within disciplines. Libraries have fewer formalized relationships outside of academic departments. Building relationships with non-academic departments (e.g. student affairs, student groups, multicultural groups, residential life, etc.) can allow libraries to meet a wider variety of needs, identify valuable collaborations, and make new connections. There are examples in the literature of many exciting partnerships between libraries and other departments such as multicultural student centers,[1] student organizations,[2] and campus childcare providers.[3] At Dartmouth College, like many other campuses, the Library is well integrated into the curriculum and plays a valuable role in students' classroom learning. The Library is less well integrated with student life outside of the classroom and in recent years has worked to develop more co-curricular partnerships. We will describe how we identified and advocated for a role for the Library in Dartmouth College's new undergraduate housing model and will detail our experiences and lessons learned from implementing a campus-wide house librarian program.

At Dartmouth, the Library's Education & Outreach program (E&O) is the natural home for this type of work. One of E&O's primary goals is to integrate the library into the intellectual life of the Dartmouth community and support learning at Dartmouth. We the authors are both members of the E&O team, a group of twelve librarians and staff members from across the Dartmouth College Library system who are involved in teaching and library outreach. E&O members coordinate a variety of events and sessions that are focused on bringing the library into the curriculum as well as equipping librarians to be excellent educators. Additionally, E&O takes the lead on connecting the Library with campus partners that support student learning such as the First Generation Network, the student peer writing center, the Academic Skills Center, and the undergraduate deans.

E&O has long sought campus partnerships to help all students succeed, especially those at risk of not succeeding academically. Students from academically at-risk populations transition more readily to college and achieve greater success when they integrate to the social and academic communities of their institutions.[4] Early and meaningful connections with faculty and staff help facilitate this integration by introducing students to networks of support on campus and lowering barriers to student participation.[5] For example, E&O members partner with Dartmouth's First Generation Network and other student academic support services to introduce first generation students to the Library as a vital resource in their academic success. E&O uses similar strategies to connect with all Dartmouth students and remove barriers that might prevent them from utilizing campus resources. This approach aligns with that advocated by Paul Thayer, "strategies that work for first-generation and low-income students are likely to be successful for the general student population as well."[6]

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Increasingly, universities are approaching the student experience holistically, working to improve and integrate students' academic, social, and co-curricular life and activities. In 2014, Dartmouth President Phil Hanlon began work on a plan to make campus life "safe and sustainable," by addressing "high-risk behavior and a lack of inclusivity" on campus. The result was *Moving Dartmouth Forward*, a plan that seeks to "create an environment for living and learning that is conducive to Dartmouth reaching its full potential," in research and teaching.[7] *Moving Dartmouth Forward* aims to achieve this by transforming residential life, improving campus safety, implementing a code of conduct, and supporting learning outside the classroom. These campus-wide initiatives provide the Dartmouth College Library with an opportunity to integrate with a broader range of campus partners and support student learning everywhere it happens.

House Librarians

In 2016, as part of the *Moving Dartmouth Forward* initiative, Dartmouth launched a new undergraduate housing model with the goal of providing more opportunities for intellectual engagement through social encounters among students, faculty, and staff. During the day, the campus is an intellectually-engaged community with free exchange of ideas among community members. The housing communities aim to extend this dynamic more fully into the student experience, after hours and outside of the classroom. Rebecca Biron,[8] Dean of the College, explained that the communities, "are based on the simple premise that successful learning requires strong community bonds. The houses will provide more opportunities for intellectual engagement through social encounters among students, faculty, and staff." Dartmouth created seven house communities—North Park, South, School, West, East Wheelock, Allen, and McLaughlin. Each community consists of several buildings—dormitories, social spaces, and professors' houses—that are located in close proximity to one another. Each community has a house professor who heads the programming, social events, academic activities, and community-creation for house members. A unique and crucial element of Dartmouth's system is that the student members are randomly assigned houses, and the houses are neither thematic nor interest-based. This results in representative cross-sections of the Dartmouth student body in each house, furthering the goal of creating strong bonds in a diverse community.

There is a natural affinity between the goals for the house communities and the mission of the Dartmouth College Library. Intellectual engagement and growth, both in and outside the classroom, are at the foundation of the Library and the house communities. We decided to propose a program formally linking the Library with the new housing community; we were enthusiastic about the potential both for improved student experience and for opportunities to engage further with the campus community, especially undergraduate students.

After securing our Library administration's support for this idea, we reached out to colleagues at other libraries to learn about their student and residential life connections. Our first call was to Ramona Islam at Harvard University who had recently presented at the 2015 Dartmouth October Conference on Harvard's Library Peer Research Fellows residential outreach program. We also spoke with Emily Horning about Yale University's Personal Librarians. These librarians, and others, shared information about their programs' goals, activities, and staffing models that shaped our approach to Dartmouth's program. Next, we developed an idea for a house librarians model that pairs a librarian with each house community, mirroring the house professor model. We then met with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs who expressed enthusiasm for our idea and arranged for us to present to the house council—the coordinating body for the house communities consisting of the house professors, the Dean of Students, and representatives from Student Affairs and from Residential Life.

We prepared a formal proposal and presentation, making a strong case for the value of a house librarians program. We cited the Library's and house council's shared missions, created images with librarians' smiling

faces alongside those of the house professors, and laid out goals for the house librarians. Our goals included being active and integral members of house communities, being recognized by students as part of their communities, enriching intellectual engagement of house communities, partnering with house faculty on formal and informal programming, and participating in house community activities. We expected that the house council was receiving regular requests such as ours from other units with complementary programming ideas, and we were concerned that they would be guarded against "hangers on" who wanted to piggyback on their hard work. However, in meeting with the house council, we found they were looking for campus partners and were appreciative of our enthusiasm for the new housing model. In our conversation with the council, our commitment to being responsive to student needs and our openness to trying new and exciting outreach resonated with the faculty. The house council members readily agreed that the house librarians would be a welcome and beneficial addition to the house communities. The house librarians, several of whom are members of E&O, were recruited based on their commitment to teaching and learning; they represent a diversity of libraries and disciplines from across campus. The house librarians began to meet regularly as a group as well as meet individually with the house professors in order to prepare for the communities launch.

Since the house communities launched in early 2016, the house librarians have coordinated and participated in a number of different events. The launch event for the house system was held in Baker-Berry Library, with each house librarian helping to welcome students to their newly assigned houses along with the house professor and other house-affiliated staff. House librarians attended kickoff events and social events for their houses, where they met students and got to know other members of their houses. At the Library's First Year Open House at the start of fall term, students were asked to find their house librarian (working at a table for their library branch or department) to win a prize. During midterms, house librarians brought therapy dogs into the house centers which serve as shared spaces for students in a housing community. An upcoming event will see house librarians hosting an evening at Dartmouth's Book Arts Workshop. The overarching goal of these events has been to integrate the house librarians into house life in a way that encourages engagement without replicating the work that librarians are doing in the classroom or at the reference desk.

Next Steps

In the future, Dartmouth's house librarians will continue to develop student-driven programming that places librarians as embedded members of the house communities. Each house elects a student house council whose role is to develop events and help the house professors in community building. These students will be ideal partners for the house librarians as we work to create new and contribute to existing programs based on student interest and needs. Ongoing communication with the house professors will also play an important role in the future of the house librarians' success. These ongoing conversations not only will lead to worthwhile outreach but also will shape the house librarians' overarching goals for this partnership.

When we created the house librarians program, we developed some initial start up goals aimed at helping us to get involved with the house communities and experiment with different types of programming in this new outreach initiative. Now that we have some experience, the house librarians group will work together to develop some more substantial future goals. For example, we will create guidelines for the frequency of programming to be offered throughout the year, and we will develop strategies for measuring the impact of the house librarians, including both qualitative and quantitative measures. We hope to demonstrate that we are creating deeper connections with the students in our communities, and assessment will allow us to celebrate our successes while recognizing areas where we can improve.

Building Partnerships

In the process of building a partnership between our library and Dartmouth's new housing communities, we have learned a great deal about how to approach the formation of partnerships, which we hope other librarians will find useful. With respect to identifying partners, much of what we learned aligns with the strategies that Candace Dahl has described for identifying candidates for a formal liaison program. These strategies include identifying unmet needs on campus including groups that gather information, conduct research, or can benefit from using library resources; and considering groups and departments who have goals in common with the library or who can better reach their goals by partnering with the library.[9]

Once potential partners have been found, librarians can initiate conversations with those groups, especially with those individuals who are open to building new connections outside of their departments. Librarians should enter these conversations with open minds, and the ability to be flexible, recognizing that the goals, resources, and limitations of collaborators may differ from their own. It is also important to have one's "pitch" prepared in advance of these meetings. Librarians should know both what they hope to attain from the partnership and what they are able to offer to the department or students that they will be working with. At our initial house council meeting, for example, we expressed that our goal was to assign a house librarian to each house community, but we made it clear that we weren't looking for a new avenue through which to offer information literacy instruction. The house council appreciated our willingness to be responsive to the needs of students and that we were open to working with them to determine what our roles could be.

One of the major barriers to building partnerships is a lack of understanding of what added value the library can offer. Faculty and staff can have different perceptions of what the library does and may not be aware of the many programs and services available through the library. Librarians and others working in an institution may work toward similar outcomes without knowing it. It is extremely important when attempting to build a new partnership for librarians to effectively communicate what their roles are in the library and how they think they might be able to work with others to mutual benefit and for the benefit of the students, faculty, or institution. In our example, we did this very explicitly. In our presentation to the house council, we showed the missions of the Library and the house communities side-by-side and highlighted areas of overlap. It was important that we showed our potential partners that our work is mission-driven and student-centered, not self-serving, and would add value for the house communities.

Creating new partnerships and developing relationships with students and staff in other departments can be time-consuming, especially in the early stages of developing a new initiative. It can be helpful to have support from library administrators and the ability to devote less time to other tasks. In many cases, especially in settings with a small staff complement, no additional staff time may be available. This lack of time is a substantial challenge to overcome when starting a new collaborative initiative. We have recognized this limitation and needed to be realistic in our expectations of how much time each librarian could devote to her house, with the expectation being that each house librarian will participate in only a few house events each academic term and that she will serve for a fixed number of years. We have also found it helpful to work together as a group of seven house librarians and to share ideas with each other so that we can repurpose events and programs that have been used by others.

Conclusion

The Dartmouth College Library built on its strong foundation of education and outreach to develop a house librarian program that embeds librarians in campus residential life. We built on the success of our academic li-

aison librarian program to create exciting partnerships that simultaneously furthered the mission of the Library and of the College administration. We approached our work with openness and flexibility and a willingness to be responsive to our partners. For us, this meant starting our work with loosely defined goals, interacting with students in new and more informal ways, and developing programming with "soft" goals rather than clearly defined learning outcomes. As a holistic approach to education evolves in higher education institutions, academic libraries can continue to develop and build partnerships to support student life and student success.

Notes

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