Insourcing Library Outreach:

Engaging Technical Services in Outreach to Student Organizations

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Sarah LeMire and Julie Mosbo Ballestro

Abstract

In recent years, library outreach has become an increasingly important aspect of public services work. In order to expand capacity and engage patrons, libraries should consider expanding their library outreach programs to include the efforts and expertise of technical services personnel. In this article, librarians from Texas A&M University will share how public services librarians, cataloging experts, and preservation librarians collaborated to provide support for a student-led textbook lending library for student veterans. Through this collaboration, the library was able to develop new outreach opportunities that highlighted technical services expertise as well as lend support to an important campus effort to improve the affordability of college textbooks for veterans.

Introduction

College and university libraries often strive to connect with patrons to increase awareness and usage of library resources. Outreach has become a common responsibility in public services librarian job descriptions, and many libraries have created outreach-specific positions. However, outreach and patron engagement is a function that can and should extend beyond the boundaries of library public services. Library workers in technical services roles, which may not have defined public services responsibilities, have unique skill sets that can be utilized in support of library outreach.

Broadening the boundaries of library employees engaging in library outreach benefits multiple

stakeholders: the library, patrons, and those employees new to outreach. By including library

technical services employees, libraries increase the number of employees who are available for

outreach activities, thus expanding their capacity. However, the benefits extend beyond a larger

pool of labor. Libraries can create new opportunities for technical services employees by

strategically selecting outreach activities that rely on their unique skill sets. Sharing specific

areas of expertise with the public improves the patron experience. This article provides a case

study of how libraries can develop new outreach efforts to support a student organization by

employing the unique skill sets of non-public services personnel.

Literature Review

In order to connect with new and underserved campus populations, academic libraries are

increasingly turning to outreach. Libraries are using outreach to engage with underserved patron

populations (Helton 2010; Mathuews and Lewis 2017; Rutledge and LeMire 2016; Walter 2005)

as well as other unique populations such as first-year students (Currie 2009; Collins and

Dodsworth 2011), international students (Langer and Kubo 2015; Li, McDowell, and Wang

2016), and distance education students (Holloway 2011; Ziegler 2017). Libraries frequently

report collaborating on outreach activities with campus units such as student services (Crowe

2010; Love and Edwards 2009; Ursin Cummings 2007), student organizations (Engle 2011), and

academic departments (Cannady, King, and Blendinger 2012).

Library outreach takes many forms, though common activities include open houses (Anderson

2012; Cahoy and Bichel 2004; Odom and Strout-Dapaz 2008), stress-relieving events that often

feature therapy dogs (Jalongo and McDevitt 2015; Lannon and Harrison 2015), and gaming

events (Oravet, 2014; Vanden Elzen & Roush, 2013). Although the library literature is replete

with case studies sharing success stories for a wide variety of outreach activities, the vast majority of these outreach success stories are focused on library public services. Very few libraries are sharing stories of patron outreach involving technical services.

Toce and Schofield (2011) were some of the first to discuss the potential outreach capacity of technical services units. They share strategies that technical services librarians at Southern Connecticut State University have used to get involved in outreach, including engaging MLIS students, running the annual book sale, and consulting with departments setting up their own libraries. Following Toce's and Schofield's lead, the Grand Valley State University Libraries explored outreach opportunities for "back of the house" staff, including lending technical services expertise to improve discoverability of small department collections and developing new partnerships related to IT support and user experience (Roth and Daniels 2015). Elguindi and Sandler also explore the outreach potential of including student services department collections within the integrated library system. They note that, "although it is a complex undertaking that can be full of politics and additional work for what may be an already busy cataloging staff, bringing student affairs and departmental collections into the library's ILS is a major form of outreach that can be performed by the technical services area of the library" (Elguindi and Sadler 2013, 295).

Although a few libraries have begun exploring the potential for technical services involvement in library outreach, there is no discussion in the literature of technical services outreach to student organizations. This article contributes toward filling that hole in the literature.

Institutional Background

Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas is one of the largest universities in the country. With an enrollment of over 66,000 students, 19 colleges and schools, and over 130 undergraduate degrees, it can be an overwhelming campus (Texas A&M University 2017a, 2017b). Texas A&M is also a uniquely military institution. It is one of only a handful of senior military colleges and graduates hundreds of military cadets each year. It also enrolls thousands of military veterans, military and veteran spouses, and children of veterans and service members. These veteran and military-affiliated students make up only one of the many different groups on campus who may view Texas A&M University as large, complicated, and sometimes difficult to navigate.

In addition to the University itself, the Texas A&M University Libraries can be overwhelming for students, staff, and faculty. The University Libraries is comprised of five libraries, employs over 90 librarians, and includes over 5.3 million volumes. The main university library, the Sterling C. Evans Library, is a large, labyrinthine library that also connects to a second library. Despite, or perhaps because of, its size and scope, the Texas A&M University Libraries prides itself on being "the indispensable hub of discovery, learning, & creativity" on campus (Texas A&M University Libraries 2017).

In order to provide support for students and reduce barriers to library access, the University Libraries maintains a Learning and Outreach (L&O) unit that focuses on engaging students, reducing library anxiety, and increasing facility with library resources through library instruction and outreach. L&O staff and faculty members coordinate approximately 100 outreach events and programs per year with an estimated total reach of 13,000. These outreach events include auditorium-style orientation presentations, resource tables at new student orientations, and large-

scale library open houses. They also include smaller-scale, targeted outreach activities, especially to underserved populations. L&O provides outreach to LGBTQ students, first-generation students, students from traditionally underrepresented groups, and student veterans, among others.

Although L&O is responsible for leading the University Libraries' outreach efforts, the scope and scale of the Texas A&M University campus means that L&O frequently relies on other library staff, faculty, and student workers to help manage and staff outreach events. From science and engineering to agriculture and business, subject librarians frequently volunteer to staff resource tables at new student orientation and help with presentations at auditorium-style orientation presentations. Everyone from human resources to archivists to preservation librarians provides support for the Libraries' annual Open House event.

The University Libraries' outreach program could not function without the contributions and support of everyone in the library, and there is considerable value in bringing together library employees from across the Libraries to reach out to the University community. However, L&O librarians recognized that some library employees were not comfortable participating in this type of outreach. One reason was that the outreach tasks that some of these library employees were performing did not necessarily match their area of expertise. For example, catalogers were handing out pizza, information technology was setting up and tearing down tables, and preservation was hosting a carnival game. These tasks were utterly crucial to the success of the event and many library employees expressed appreciation for an opportunity to interact directly with students. However, L&O librarians were interested in finding opportunities to engage library faculty, staff, and students, especially those who did not work in public services roles, in

outreach opportunities that would actually highlight their unique and valuable skill sets and help them accomplish outreach goals for their own units.

Library Support for Aggie Shields

Although the majority of the University Libraries' outreach activities are aimed at the general student population or at specific colleges or majors, L&O does work to provide specific outreach to groups likely to be considered underserved on the Texas A&M University campus. One of these groups is student veterans and service members. Students who have served in the military are a population with several unique characteristics. Student veterans are likely to be older than traditional college students, they tend to have significant work and family responsibilities, and they are likely to have multiple risk factors for college completion (Kim and Cole 2013; Molina and Morse 2015). Accordingly, many colleges and universities have been increasing their support for student veterans and service members (McBain et al. 2012).

The Texas A&M University Libraries has been involved in efforts to support veterans for several years. One early and ongoing effort has been the Libraries' involvement with the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV), a national program supporting entrepreneurial veterans with disabilities (Hoppenfeld et al. 2013). Under the leadership of the Libraries' First Year Experience (FYE) librarian, a member of L&O, the Libraries has increased its support for student veterans and service members in recent years. The Libraries now participates actively in resource fairs for new veteran and military-affiliated students and collaborates with the campus Veteran Resource and Support Center (VRSC) on programming and services for veterans. Most recently, the Libraries has provided support for Texas A&M University's inaugural instance of the national Warrior-Scholar Project, a program preparing veterans and service members for academic success at highly competitive academic institutions.

In 2016, an opportunity arose that would allow L&O to further two goals: to continue to improve library support for student veterans and service members, and to develop outreach opportunities that would allow non-public services library employees to highlight their unique skill sets. This opportunity came in the form of an invitation to collaborate with a unique campus partner: Aggie Shields. Aggie Shields is a registered student organization that was founded in 2013 with a mission "focused on alleviating the financial and social burdens of student veterans by providing academic resources and community events" (Aggie Shields 2017). One of Aggie Shields' most popular activities has been collecting donated textbooks and adding them to their lending library for student veterans. Aggie Shields maintains several shelves of textbooks in the campus VRSC and lends these textbooks out to student veterans on a semester-long basis, which saves student veterans thousands of dollars each semester. Student veterans and the Texas A&M University community had an overwhelmingly positive response to the launch of this new resource; the lending library became a popular service among student veterans, and the entire student body was generous in donating textbooks. The student-run Aggie Shields soon outgrew its capacity, both in physical space and in the technical knowledge required to run a successful and efficient library. In order to meet the increasing demand for Aggie Shields library services, the student organization needed to improve in several critical areas: access and discoverability, preservation, and facilities.

When Aggie Shields leadership approached the FYE librarian in early 2016, she immediately recognized an opportunity to pilot an outreach approach that specifically utilized the unique skill sets available in the Libraries. She put together a team of library staff and faculty interested in participating in this outreach opportunity. This team included staff and faculty with expertise in cataloging, preservation and conservation, facilities, and other areas.

Access and Discoverability

The faculty and staff of the University Libraries' Metadata and Cataloging and Monograph Copy Cataloging departments regularly participate in library outreach activities. For example, catalogers regularly staff booths at the Libraries' Open House event, and they even travel out to give orientation presentations at Fish Camp, the University's orientation camp for incoming first-year students. However, these outreach activities focus on the Libraries' general outreach objectives related to library anxiety and library service and resource awareness. They do not focus on the specific and unique knowledge and skill set of library catalogers.

Three members of the Metadata and Cataloging and Monograph Copy Cataloging departments seized upon the opportunity to share their expertise with a group of students. Aggie Shields had been using a student-developed cataloging system that required a substantial amount of manual data entry, had limited functionality, and, most importantly, became impossible to update when the student who developed the system graduated and lost touch with the current student membership. The students needed a new solution that would improve access and discoverability for their patrons and reduce the amount of manual labor for Aggie Shields. Fortunately, the University Libraries has extensive expertise in this area.

The catalogers met with the students to discuss their library's needs, expertise, and budget. Based upon these conversations, librarians determined that the students had several critical needs:

- Online access both on the front-end, so patrons could search, and on the back-end, so Aggie Shields could update and add materials remotely
- Ability to create patron accounts

- Ability to scan and add textbooks by ISBN

- Ability to generate reports of books still checked out at the end of the semester

Based upon these criteria, the librarians reviewed available cataloging resources. One option that librarians discussed was the possibility of adding the Aggie Shields collection to the library catalog. This was not a viable option due to the frequent turnover of the collection and its managers, the limited audience for the collection, and the large number of similar collections on the Texas A&M campus. Because the Aggie Shields lending library's size, needs, and available resources were so dramatically different from that of the University Libraries, the librarians had to explore options more frequently used for small department, school, or church libraries. The librarians discovered TinyCat, an online cataloging system that uses Library Thing as a back-end (TinyCat 2018). This system would provide Aggie Shields students with virtually all of their required features at an estimated cost of only $6.00/month, which was well within their estimated budget.

The Aggie Shields students set up a free trial of TinyCat and began experimenting with this new, more robust cataloging system. Although they quickly determined that TinyCat would meet their needs, they also realized that they had additional questions about how to catalog their materials. Although they could add standard descriptive metadata by scanning the ISBN, they had questions about whether and how to tag each item. Would it be helpful to add the course name and code for which the textbook was used? This would be helpful for students who were searching for a book for a specific class (e.g. ENGL 104), but the Aggie Shields students might not have this information readily available. Would it be useful to tag each item with a general location? The Aggie Shields students were not prepared to add call numbers for each book, but they could add the number of the bookshelf where the book could be found. The students had

additional questions about marking and barcoding books to identify Aggie Shields materials and avoid confusion over multiple copies of popular textbooks. Librarians were able to walk the students through each of their questions to help them find solutions that worked best for their unique context.

Through their outreach efforts, librarians were able to help the Aggie Shields student leadership put together a cataloging system that not only was functional, but also so easy to implement that Aggie Shields was able to add existing and newly donated textbooks to the catalog in time for the Fall 2016 semester. This outreach success related to access and discoverability proved to be only the first of several successful partnerships between the Libraries and Aggie Shields.

Preservation

Outreach plays a key role in the field of cultural heritage preservation. Outreach to the community and organizations is part of the everyday job of a preservation administrator or a conservator. Several national strategies have been developed to provide additional outreach opportunities. Preservation Week (established in 2010) was developed from data gathered for the 2004 Heritage Preservation national survey. This data showed that individuals were unaware of the risks that their personal and institutional collections were facing. The American Library Association partnered with the Library of Congress, the Institute of Library and Museum Services, the American Institute for Conservation, the Society of American Archivists, and Heritage Preservation to develop a national week that focuses on the preservation issues that collections face. Institutions also provide preventive tips on how to take care of the variety of material types and condition issues that individuals might face (American Library Association 2018).

Preservation professionals often find themselves providing outreach after disasters. The Florence flood of 1966 is considered by many as the beginning of the movement to develop disaster planning and organize response and recovery methods for collections. Preservation, conservation, archives, and museum professionals have been crucial to the recovery of collections and become part of the recovery stories for the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Harvey, and Irma. Outreach groups developed by several organizations, such as the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) National Heritage Responders, were created to provide 24 hour phone support for cultural heritage emergencies.

Texas A&M's FYE librarian contacted the Preservation unit to provide assistance with binding issues that the Aggie Shields organization was facing. They had received 100 loose leaf textbooks that they were unsure of how to bind to make them accessible for checkout. The standard way of binding them would have been to use three ring binders. Preservation was in the process of evaluating the use of three ring binders in the Libraries' general collections and preparing solutions for the issues that they cause; primarily, ripping of pages during use, sagging of paper in the binder due to gravity, and splitting of the cover and gutter seams. Preservation librarians suggested report covers as a solution. The report covers, while not ideal from a long-term preservation standpoint, met the criteria of something that could withstand the Aggie Shields shelving, survive a backpack, and cost little money. Textbook editions are replaced every one to two years, so this solution would allow for preserving the items for that period of time.

The discussion on how to bind the loose leaf textbooks uncovered additional preservation needs for the Aggie Shields collection. The Director of Preservation visited the organization with the FYE librarian to evaluate their needs. After assessing the condition of the books and the willingness of the volunteers to learn new skills, the Director of Preservation and the book repair

manager returned to Aggie Shields several weeks later with supplies to train the volunteers on how to complete basic book repair for the collection. This included book tape for spine repair and corner damage, a container of polyvinyl acetate (PVA) adhesive and wooden skewers for hinge tightening, and filmoplast for page repair. Preservation provided a basic care-and-handling training session that included appropriate book supports on shelves and identifying damage for repair. A demo on book repair was provided and the volunteers were given the opportunity to try to complete the repairs on their own, which was met with success.

Facilities

In addition to access and discoverability and preservation, a third area of difficulty for Aggie Shields was facilities. Due to its overwhelming popularity, the Aggie Shields lending library quickly outgrew its allocated space in the VRSC. The lending library's textbooks were housed on commercial bookshelves scattered throughout the VRSC and that were literally sagging under the weight of the textbooks.

The most critical facilities need for Aggie Shields was a larger space. However, this was not within the University Libraries' ability to provide, since the Libraries does not allocate space for collections that can be accessed by only a subset of the University population. However, through consistent outreach to the Aggie Shields student organization and the VRSC, the FYE librarian was able to identify other opportunities to alleviate facilities issues.

First, librarians introduced concepts of collection management to the Aggie Shields student leadership. Librarians explained how the previously mentioned TinyCat cataloging system would help the Aggie Shields students keep better circulation records and therefore help identify low-circulation items that could be deaccessioned. The Aggie Shields lending library contained

multiple copies of some low-use textbooks that could be deaccessioned immediately, freeing up space for newly donated materials.

The FYE librarian also reached out to the University Libraries' facilities department to determine whether there might be a possibility of donating discarded library shelving. Although the University Libraries typically reuses shelving at other library locations, the timing of this request proved to be fortuitous. The Libraries was in the midst of a collections project that would result in discarding several ranges of shelving. This shelving could be used to replace the commercial shelving units that were falling apart due to the weight of the books. The donated shelves were taller and could hold more books, thereby increasing the facilities capacity of the Aggie Shields lending library without significantly increasing its space allocation.

Impact

The University Libraries' outreach to Aggie Shields has caused impact in a variety of areas. First, Aggie Shields' capacity to support Texas A&M student veterans grew dramatically. Aggie Shields reported that the number of textbooks checked out grew dramatically over the Fall 2016-Spring 2017 academic year (O'Neal 2017). Though many factors may have contributed to this growth, the increased discoverability of Aggie Shields textbooks via its new catalog certainly played a role. Preservation support extended the lifespan of some heavily-used library materials, and the Libraries' discarded shelving found a new home in the VRSC, expanding storage capacity for Aggie Shields' collections.

Within the Libraries, the Aggie Shields project has initiated cross-departmental collaborations in areas that previously were quite separate. Librarians in L&O now have a better understanding of the outreach goals and capabilities of catalogers, preservation librarians, and facilities staff, and

have more concrete ideas for how to engage these departments in outreach in the future. They also have a model to build on when reaching out to other campus units and student organizations. For example, the FYE librarian works with a variety of campus units that have internal lending libraries. After the successful Aggie Shields project, she now has an idea of what support the Libraries could offer and which stakeholders to involve from the beginning. The Aggie Shields project also provided participating departments with a case study of how the campus and community can benefit from their expertise. For example, the Preservation unit was able to reference the successful Aggie Shields collaboration when requesting funding from the Friends of the Texas A&M University Libraries to develop a pilot preservation outreach program on campus. They have already begun to lend their preservation expertise to the University Galleries, the Association of Former Students, the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band, and various departments and colleges including Sociology, Chemistry, and Education.

Finally, the Aggie Shields outreach project was another step toward developing a sound relationship with the VRSC. The University Libraries strives to provide support and outreach to student veterans on campus, and the Aggie Shields lending library has been one of the most popular and high-impact campus efforts. By partnering with Aggie Shields, the Libraries sent a clear message to the VRSC and to student veterans that the Libraries is here to support them and their work. This collaboration has increased awareness on campus and with strategic partners that the Libraries is a contributor toward student veteran support efforts.

Next Steps

Student and volunteer turnover is always an issue when dealing with any type of training, and the basic book repair training is no exception. When an expert is not available to teach the next group of students, the students do their own training -- continually handing it down to the next

students and so on. This creates a situation where the repair process, though well meaning, can cause additional damage or be unsuccessful. Further meetings with the new Aggie Shields students and volunteers is necessary to keep the training fresh and accurate.

As the Aggie Shields student leadership changes every year, librarians make an effort to make contact with them on an annual basis. Incoming student leaders tend to be unaware of the full extent of library expertise available to them or the efforts that were conducted in the past, so for librarians, this outreach often appears to be starting from scratch again every year. Despite this challenge, ongoing conversations with Aggie Shields student leadership reveals that the students continue to struggle with the logistical challenges of maintaining a library and that they are interested in gaining insights from professional librarians.

Conclusion

As library outreach programs continue to grow, it can be tempting for libraries to expand library outreach responsibilities just to increase the available labor force to staff outreach events. And indeed, many library outreach activities can benefit from additional support from throughout the library. But libraries that are interested in engaging their technical services personnel in outreach should consider whether there are outreach opportunities that will allow them to share their unique knowledge and skills sets with the public. Small departmental libraries are common on college campuses, and connecting technical services experts with those managing departmental libraries can be a unique way to begin a collaboration. As Texas A&M University Libraries' collaboration with Aggie Shields demonstrated, student organizations may also have libraries or other projects that would benefit from an infusion of technical services expertise. By engaging in these types of collaborations, libraries can increase opportunities for communication and

collaboration, not just between libraries and campus organizations, but between public services and technical services personnel within the library.

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