

## Against the Grain

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# Optimizing Library Services – Food for Thought: Leveraging Library Services to Address Food Insecurity

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mix can be alienating. When staff surface new ideas for services and communications, try prompting them to think through marketing details like defining their intended market and articulating their market's needs. You can invoke these and other marketing concepts to instill them in your organization while using familiar, comfortable terms.

- **Improve or establish internal communication channels.** Marketing literature clearly identifies the need for solid communications that span all levels in the organization. Does your library have the means to enable cross-unit conversations throughout the hierarchy? Are staff able to easily share user needs they encounter to inform service improvements? If not, try initiating some communication improvements to establish this important prerequisite for marketing work.

In addition to more faithfully fulfilling the spirit and goals of a strategic plan, I find that marketing conversations nearly always offer an opportunity to be more rigorous in my planning thought process. The mere act of filling out a couple of sentences for each marketing plan element surfaces questionable assumptions and logic problems that should be reconciled, even if the plan never gets widely adopted. If

nothing else, use a marketing plan to prompt internal conversation, and you're likely to find tremendous value and inspiration in viewing your library services with a market-oriented perspective. 🐾

#### Endnotes

1. See the guided marketing template at <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/publishing/editions/webextras/fisher09096/Worksheet04.pdf>.
2. For additional details and resources, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketing\\_mix#Modified\\_and\\_expanded\\_marketing\\_mix:\\_7\\_Ps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketing_mix#Modified_and_expanded_marketing_mix:_7_Ps).
3. <https://library.pdx.edu/about/strategic-plan/>
4. **Simkin, Lyndon.** "Barriers Impeding Effective Implementation of Marketing Plans—A Training Agenda." *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* 17, no. 1 (2002): 9.
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6. **Simkin,** 15.
7. **Sashittal, Hemant C. and Avan R. Jassawalla.** "Marketing Implementation in Smaller Organizations: Definition, Framework, and Propositional Inventory." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 29, no. 1 (2001): 65.
8. **Sashittal and Jassawalla,** 61.

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## Optimizing Library Services — Food for Thought: Leveraging Library Services to Address Food Insecurity

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**Column Editors' Note:** This column features **IGI Global** contributing author **Kymberly Goodson**, the Program Director for Spaces, Lending, & Access at the **University of California San Diego, USA**, and her colleague **Rachel Conry**, the Circulation Services Manager at the **University of California San Diego, USA**. Ms. Goodson is a contributor to and editor of the publication **Incrementally Building Community and User Engagement in the UC San Diego Library**, and she is also a contributing author to **Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries**, edited by **Sheila Bonnard** and **Mary Anne Hansen** from **Montana State University, USA**.— **CJC and LW**

### Introduction

In June 2018, the **University of California (UC), San Diego Library** held an inaugural Food for Fine\$ drive, collecting non-perishable food items benefiting the year-round campus food pantry in exchange for fine forgiveness. The drive has continued twice annually, in December and June, intentionally timed to coincide with students moving out of their dorms and residences at the end of the school year. Steadily gaining popularity among the

student community, each instance evolves in response to observations and feedback.

Complementing the Library's myriad de-stress and wellness activities, this campaign supports students' basic needs and raises awareness about often hidden food scarcity issues on campus. Providing an incentive for library users to give back to fellow students sets an example for collaboration and generosity and encourages students to consider alternatives to food waste, both in the immediate and long terms.

### Literature Review

Food drives, often called Food for Fines, have long been popular in public libraries across the nation for patron relations and retention, resumption of borrowing privileges, and return of overdue items. Some offer one-for-one exchange of grocery items for forgiveness of fines associated with a single overdue item, while others specify a per-item credit value. Beyond non-perishable food, some public libraries have accepted pet supplies (Library Administrator's Digest, 2013); paper, cleaning, and hygiene products (Library Adminis-

trator's Digest, 2014, p. 5); and contributions to Ethiopian relief (Simpson, 1984, p. 29) for credit toward fines. Many libraries report positive exposure for the library and positive user response to such initiatives (Library Administrator's Digest, 2010, p. 17-18). Opponents criticize such initiatives for reducing an important source of library income and as labor intensive activities not directly related to the library's primary mission (Library Administrator's Digest, 2014, p. 5).

With greater awareness of the growing prevalence of food insecurity on college campuses, academic libraries have begun to tap into the opportunities this kind of programming affords. See examples in the Resources section.

Some Food for Fines policies vary across participating academic libraries, while others are more universal.

- All require donations in good condition, unopened, and not expired. Some refuse items in glass containers.

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- Most exclude replacement fees and fines for lost or damaged items.
- Most allow users to donate food items even without fees to be waived.
- Most designate a fixed per-item value, typically \$1.00-\$5.00, while a few offer a range of credit depending on the item.
- Many set a maximum amount of credit that can be earned, often ranging from \$20.00 to \$50.00.
- Some allow for credit toward already paid or future fines, while others specifically exclude these.
- Some specify a limited time for their initiatives, typically one to three weeks, while others do not. The **University of Dayton** scheduled its food drive to correspond with April's National Library Week.
- Some specify a time during which eligible fines must have been accrued, such as the current academic term.
- Some offer the initiative once annually, while others host it several times each year.
- Some specify most-needed items (often breakfast items, canned meat, and non-perishable milk) and may offer additional credit for those.
- Some accept toiletries and hygiene products in addition to food donations.

### Context

Food insecurity is defined by the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** as "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (2018). Despite a wealth of negative impacts on the academic experience, food insecurity is common among college and university students nationwide. Most of these institutions offer a food pantry for their students, though many remain under-resourced and face ever-increasing use of their services. Twelve (Wood, Harris III, & Delgado, 2016, p. 3) to forty-eight (Dubick, et al., 2016, p. 7) percent of college student respondents in two 2016 reports experienced food insecurity that year.

Despite the perceived affluence and privilege of **UC San Diego** students, national trends in food insecurity are present. Understanding this challenge, **UC President Janet Napolitano** launched the Global Food Initiative in 2016 to "develop solutions for food, health, and sustainability throughout the **UC** system and beyond" (Wong, 2019). **UC and California State University** in-state tuition has more than tripled over the past two decades (Robbins, 2019). Though regular tuition increases leveled off in recent years, the San Diego area maintains a high cost of living (79% above national average, according to Salary Expert), making covering basic expenses like food and rent

challenging for many students. Approximately one-third of **UC San Diego's** students come from homes with an annual family income of less than \$60,000 (Robbins, 2019). The 2018 **University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)**, a biennial survey of student behaviors and circumstances conducted at **UC's** nine undergraduate campuses, found 18-43 percent of respondents experienced some elements of food insecurity during the 2017-18 academic year. It was in this context that the **UC San Diego Library** chose to contribute to wider campus efforts to support student success beyond traditional library services.

### Implementation

Preliminary considerations for the food drive included identifying appropriate fees to waive, waiver limits, eligible food items, credit values, training for service and billing staff, outreach strategies, documentation, and statistics collection.

While monies collected from fines and fees add negligible amounts to the Library's budget, replacement costs for lost or damaged items do represent a modest but important portion of the Library's replacement fund. As such, replacement charges are the only fees excluded from waiver eligibility. Administrative billing and processing fees associated with replacement charges are eligible, along with overdue fines for recalls and course reserves.

Individual waiver limits were set at \$40.00 — sufficient to clear four overdue reserves charges (by far the most common charge), processing fees for two replacement items, or nearly three recall or billing fees — to incentivize participation. For many students, this can completely resolve outstanding charges, and for others it can significantly reduce the amount owed. Paid charges were also eligible for refund, but all fees must have been accrued during the current academic quarter.

Guidelines for donations were largely established by the food pantry and followed traditional restrictions such as unopened, unexpired items. Further restrictions imposed were informed by lessons learned by other institutions such as excluding "junk" items like gum and candy items and items in glass containers. Examples of eligible and ineligible items were included in promotional and training materials. For the first Food for Fine\$, for instance, all items were assigned a credit value of \$2.00, while in the subsequent drives, a special promotion was offered for full-sized donations of oatmeal and cereal, identified by the food pantry as one of their greatest needs. These highlighted items earned \$5.00 each. In the 3rd instance, single serving items such as nutritional bars and oatmeal packets were accepted at \$0.50 each.

Always mindful of service desk transaction and wait times, the acceptance process was made as simple as possible. Desk staff were given training materials to help determine acceptable items but were also empowered to make independent decisions about anything ambiguous. Staff were asked to note the number of items collected per user and total dollar value to be credited. Behind the scenes, billing

staff determine fines eligibility, process waivers, and send confirmation emails thanking all donors and confirming the credit amount. All donors receive confirmation and gratitude, even if they donated without fees to waive.

Outreach and promotion strategies, particularly regarding timing, presented the biggest challenges. Heavily promoting the campaign early can potentially encourage incurring fees and abusing the program, perhaps to the disadvantage of other users who might not gain access to needed materials. Alternately, limiting event promotion also limits awareness and participation. Promotion for the first instance was limited to two weeks immediately preceding the campaign and took the form of handouts and posters in the library, digital signage, social media posts, and a campus newspaper article. Adjustments were made following underwhelming participation. Later, the event was promoted throughout the quarter, primarily when users were notified of accrued fees, with business cards advertising brief details. Other expanded outreach efforts included:

- Flyers and digital signs in the student center and other campus locations
- Ads on campus shuttles
- Events posted to University and student calendars
- A message to the University's Reddit group and other social media outlets
- Displays of eligible food items in busy Library spaces and at the Front Desk

After each drive, donations are categorized, counted, and documented, including the number of unique contributors and average and overall value of collective donations. Photos are taken of student employees showcasing the collection, both in the library and with food pantry staff, for use in future promotional materials. Library assessment staff compile results and statistics into a report, and Food for Fine\$ organizers use the data to identify trends and strategies that inform the next iteration.

### Outcome

Participants, donated items, and fines waived all increased during each instance of the initiative. Across three instances, donations were accepted from 93 individuals, who benefitted by receiving a collective total of \$1,126.50 in waived library fines. Perhaps more importantly, the initiative provided 530 items to the campus food pantry.

When the initiative launched, the food pantry indicated its greatest need as that for boxed cereals and oatmeal. The two latter instances incorporated a Breakfast Bonus (\$5.00 per item) for these items. The response was positive, resulting in this category garnering the greatest number of items in both instances, while it was very low when not highlighted in the inaugural instance.

Across all instances, highlighted items, canned/dry fruits and vegetables, and pasta constituted the most frequent donations. More nutritionally valuable items were also received over time, while junk food donations decreased. Over time, donors without fines to

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waive also increased, as did participants donating items well beyond the amount of their fines.

### Scalability

The planning invested prior to the foundational Food for Fine\$ campaign enabled the Library to easily re-create the initiative. Furthermore, the infrastructure is in place to extrapolate this concept for non-food-related drives benefiting the campus and local community in additional ways and furthering the Library's increasing sustainability efforts. In addition to ideas generated from the literature review (pet supplies, cleaning products, world aid, etc.), the **UC San Diego Library** is considering future drives for toothbrushes and other personal hygiene supplies, benefiting San Diego's growing homeless population which heartbreakingly includes university students, with a tagline to "Brush Away Your Fines." Similarly, a drive around the holidays could collect toys and books to support Active Duty and Veteran families, recognizing San Diego's substantial military presence. Another unique, possibly Halloween-themed idea was **Loyola Marymount University's** initiative to award \$2.00 off library fines to participants of the campus blood drive. Cycling through themes keeps the events fresh and engaging, sheds light on other issues facing underrepresented groups, and maximizes the Library's philanthropic impact on the campus and local communities.

### Conclusion

Food for Fines drives, while more common in public libraries, are relatively simple to organize and have many benefits for academic libraries and the populations they serve. Academic libraries share a mission of supporting student success, and contrary to criticisms of these campaigns, food drives and other cross-promotional initiatives promote a more holistic approach to achieving that goal. It instills goodwill between the library and both participating and non-participating library users, as well as with campus partners and administrators, and creates a welcoming atmosphere for the student population. A Food for Fines campaign can help convert the negative experience of accruing fees into a positive one and presents the Library as a compassionate entity deeply committed to the success and well-being of both student Library users and those who utilize the campus' food assistance services. Academic libraries have a largely untapped opportunity to play a larger role in optimizing the student experience, and when that opportunity comes with a low cost and a high reward, it makes the effort even more worthwhile.

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**Column Editor's End Note:** Librarians' roles are constantly evolving to include services such as Food for Fines programs and the like, which tackles topics such as library programs and services, community involvement, food security, and sustainability. For years, IGI Global has been aware of these ever-changing roles and has worked to include the most recent and quality peer-reviewed research on these topics. Research surrounding the topics in this article can be found in IGI Global's databases, InfoSci-Books and InfoSci-Journals specifically, which act to provide valuable content to librarians and their patrons.

## Let's Get Technical — St. Thomas Library, Automating for the Future

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**Column Editor's Note:** In this issue's column, we profile how a regional organization helped a private elementary school automate their catalog. — *SM & AM*

### Introduction

Capital Region Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) partners with and supports 24 component school districts in Albany, Schenectady, Schoharie and Southern Saratoga counties. Capital Region BOCES also provides service to more than 150 school districts outside the Capital Region area and delivers more than 300 programs and services designed to support the entire educational process. Capital Region BOCES helps school districts receive access to high-quality educational services and resources at an affordable cost. The School Library System, a part of Capital Region BOCES, supports the component districts as well as nineteen private

schools in New York's Capital Region. We provide professional development, resource sharing, and print and digital products in support of our school librarians, teachers, and Students.

In July of 2018, the Capital Region BOCES School Library System was approached by **Thomas Kane**, Principal of **St. Thomas the Apostle School**, a small, private Catholic school serving students in grades pre-kindergarten through eighth in Delmar, New York, about automating their library collection. Automating the school's collection of an estimated 4,000 titles would provide greater ease-of-use, more accurate records, and access to a wide network of libraries with which to share resources. Automation is important for students as it helps them gain the skills to search more efficiently for what they need. On behalf of **St. Thomas the Apostle School**, Capital Region BOCES School Library System Director **Dr. Jen**

**Cannell** assisted the school in applying for and receiving a Regional Collections Grant from the Capital District Library Council in the amount of \$4,982 for the purpose of creating the MARC records needed to automate the **St. Thomas the Apostle School Library**.

Members of the School Library System team working on the automation project were the following: **Tia Felock**, Library Automation Coordinator; **Rebecca DeJesus**, Electronic and Media Resources Librarian; **Sophia Geitgey**, Senior Library Typist.; **Regina Boyles**, Administrative Assistant; **Shelley Viola**, Secretary to School Library System and Arts in Education; and **Tim Furgal**, School Library System Clerk.

### The Problem

**St. Thomas the Apostle School** does not have a full-time professional librarian. Prior to this project, its library records were contained

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