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Hosting Successful "Welcome Back" Events for Your Law School Students

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HOSTING SUCCESSFUL

“WELCOME BACK” EVENTS FOR YOUR LAW SCHOOL STUDENTS

Best practices for
ensuring high in-person
attendance.

BY KELLY LEONG & GAIL McDONALD

On August 25, 2021, the first day of in-person classes in more than a year, Fordham Law School’s Maloney Library hosted Library Fest, the equivalent of a party in the library that featured a raffle, vendors, and of course, snacks. The main purpose of the event was to introduce the library to both first- and second-year students, and to welcome back our rising 3L students who were sent home in the middle of the second semester of law school due to COVID-19. While the library was open to students

through most of the pandemic, the majority of students did not use the space. As an urban law school, the Maloney Library has always been a popular place to study, but we were unsure that students would return. The event proved to be a huge success, with more than 400 students coming through the library during the four-hour event. To put it into perspective, this is roughly 30 percent of our full-time JD student body. (Fordham University has strict mask and vaccine mandates with more than 97 percent of students and staff vaccinated at the time of the event.)

Getting Down to Basics

Library Fest was a library-wide endeavor that required lots of planning and participation by the library staff. The central aspect of Library Fest was the raffle. Students entered the library and received a library-branded tote bag with a raffle passport inside. The raffle featured seven stations scattered throughout the two floors of the library. If students had their passport stamped at all seven stations, they were entered to win a prize. Prizes included an iPad, a Fitbit, technology bundles including USB drives and portable chargers, and Fordham Law School swag. Three stations were staffed by vendors—Bloomberg Law, Lexis Advance, and Westlaw Edge—with each providing their own giveaways. The remaining stations were staffed by the library team and included demonstrations such as booking a study room and printing, and information on library services such as research assistance and checking out materials. We also had a hugely popular station dedicated to the community where students and library staff wrote their favorite restaurant recommendations on sticky-notes that were displayed on a wall. In addition to the raffle, students could also do a scavenger hunt for library-branded coffee tumblers that were hidden throughout the library stacks. Inside the hidden tumblers were extra raffle entries.

How did we accomplish such high attendance? How are we going to replicate this success in future library events? We aren't entirely sure, which has led us to

wonder what efforts other academic libraries have undertaken to welcome back their students and introduce them to the library space. To answer these questions, we sought to compile the welcome back events of other academic law libraries and develop some best practices based on our experiences and the experiences of others.

Choosing to hold a fall 2021 welcome back event for students was not an easy decision for the academic law libraries surveyed. Of the 34 responses we received, 16 held a welcome back event for students, and of those, more than half offered multiple events. Of the 18 survey respondents who did not hold an event, their reasons included concerns over large gatherings due to COVID-19, institutional limits on gatherings, and perceived low interest on the part of the students.

The challenge of getting students to attend a welcome back event was a paramount issue for the libraries surveyed. Of the 16 libraries that held events, all provided some type of incentive, such as giveaways, prizes, or food. Six survey respondents provided all three types of incentives. Several libraries noted that these items came from local stores or food providers. Seven survey respondents had vendors (e.g., Bloomberg, Lexis, Westlaw) with tables and supplemented with additional swag. Roughly 10 survey respondents noted that other departments helped promote their events.

To be able to provide incentives, libraries utilized their budget



resources as well as vendor-supplied food and swag. The impact of law school enrollment on budget allocation was not a part of the survey, but budgets varied. The chart below shows the budgets that the 16 survey respondents had for the event.

When looking toward the future, 93 percent of respondents who held events considered them a success and 53 percent said they would hold the event again next year, with the remaining libraries undecided.

General Considerations

- 1. DEFINE A BUDGET.** The budget will inform all aspects of the event. Define a clear budget and any budget restrictions prior to planning.
- 2. DETERMINE WHO HAS FINAL APPROVAL ON DECISIONS.** What decisions can the planning committee make, and which decisions will need approval from the library or law school administration?

BUDGETS OF THE 16 SCHOOLS THAT HELD WELCOME BACK EVENTS

		BUDGET			
		Up to \$1,000	\$1,001 to \$2,000	\$2,001 to \$3,000	\$3,001 to \$5,000
Student Enrollment	Fewer than 400	2	0	0	0
	401-599	4	0	1	1
	600-799	3	2	0	0
	800 or more	1	0	0	2

3. **STAFFING.** Determine the number of staff needed the day of the event and clearly define their responsibilities.
4. **LOGISTICS FOR THINGS LIKE RAFFLE STATIONS.** What will each station offer? How many volunteers are needed?

BEST PRACTICES

Form a Committee

Form a committee that will be dedicated to brainstorming, developing, and executing the event. At the outset, establish a committee chair to delegate tasks to committee members and set a regular schedule for the committee to meet to discuss progress. Our Library Fest committee consisted of staff members from various library departments and each member took on a discrete task, such as gathering promotional materials, contacting vendors, or researching food options. Two survey respondents specifically noted they used committees, but all respondents indicated participation from staff members across various departments such as reference and circulation, as well as student workers.

Start Planning Early

Planning for Maloney Library Fest by the five-member committee began in early June 2021, though the idea was conceived and agreed upon in early April. Prior to June, examples of similar events at other libraries were collected (a huge thank you to the University of Georgia School of Law, whose Library Fest gave us the idea) and a budget was set by the library administration.

The Library Fest committee met frequently to iron out the details and check in on progress. During these meetings we defined, assigned, and planned all aspects of the event from selecting a date to designing library branded swag (stickers were surprisingly popular) and raffle prizes. As a part of the planning, we kept a detailed

running list of all aspects of the events with every necessary step to accomplish the task, deadlines for each step, the committee member responsible for each step, and any decisions made related to the task. An event of this nature requires many decisions—large and small—so staying organized is a must.

Include Swag and Giveaways

Increase interest in your event by mentioning any swag or giveaways in all advertising materials. Depending on your budget, be sure your advertisements highlight your big-ticket items. For our Library Fest event, we had several larger items for giveaways and listed these in our promotions. We also had smaller items such as tech bundles and library-branded tumblers. Every student who attended received a customized law library tote (which the students have continued to use). Survey responses of other law libraries included swag and giveaways such as gift certificates, vouchers for local activities, and lunch boxes as well as law school and library-related items such as sticky-notes, pens, highlighters, and USB hubs.

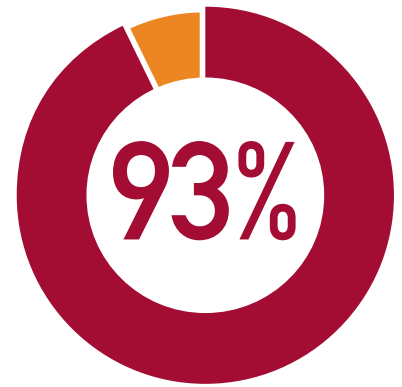
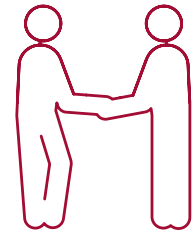
Order Early

We placed orders for library-branded swag as early as possible to make sure we would have our materials in time. One library noted that they needed to delay their event due to supply chain issues that were likely exacerbated by COVID-19, but the potential for delays is always present.

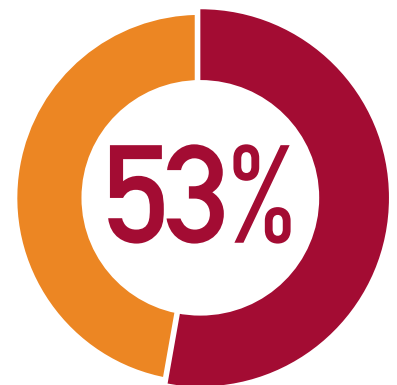
Develop a Marketing Plan

Create a marketing plan during the initial meetings of the event committee that includes a master list of the marketing materials that need to be created as well as a timeline for printing, distributing, and posting to social media.

Be sure to identify other departments that can help promote the event. We worked closely with our law school's communications



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department to create advertising materials, as well as to post signage to law school displays. We also worked with our Office of Student Affairs to have flyers placed in orientation materials and coordinated with the office to have promotional emails sent to student group leaders. Survey responses also highlighted the value of sending information about the event via law school and law library marketing emails to students. Some libraries, including Fordham, also highlighted the event through law school-wide communications such as digital displays, announcement boards, and word of mouth. Continue with your marketing the day of the event by displaying advertisements in high-traffic areas. We set up large posters in our law school lobby and near law school classrooms the morning of our event, with library-branded balloon displays to continue to attract interest the day of.

Define Success

The library administration and the Library Fest committee decided early on that success would be around 100 attendees. While there are qualitative metrics for any events, this event was about getting students into the library, so the number of attendees was our most important success factor.

Of the 14 survey respondents that categorized their events as a success, eight noted attendance or participation as a factor of that success.

Prepare a Day Ahead

Tasks scheduled for the day of the event should only be those that must be completed that day. For example, balloons and some food items were delivered the day of our event and the committee placed advertising posters in high-traffic areas. The remainder of the day should be filled with activities necessary for the event itself, including staffing each non-vendor station in the library, managing any issues



that arise, and generally making sure the event is running smoothly.

Another library mentioned that they had smaller events over a few days, which eased the stress of a single-day event and addressed social distancing issues. Other libraries hosted separate events for first-year students and second- and third-year students.

Back-Up Required

Identify where you will need staff and then create a volunteer sign-up sheet based on those needs and the time periods of the event. For Maloney Library Fest, we identified the number of staff we needed for each raffle station and created a sign-up sheet. For every station, we had at least two staff members present for each one-hour time slot to allow for adequate support. We also designated several staff as “floaters” who were tasked with monitoring the various library stations and restocking materials. Of the 15 responses we received asking about event staffing, 12 libraries responded that both librarians and non-librarian staff participated in the event. Three libraries specifically stated that all library employees participated.

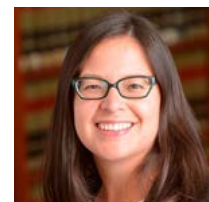
Enjoy Your Hard Work

Hosting a welcome back event is an excellent opportunity to give

the library a face, or many faces, depending on the number of library staff who are assisting with the event. Encourage the staff to interact with students as much as possible. By following the best practices outlined above, your next welcome back event is sure to be a success. ■

IM Information Management

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