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Spring 2010

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Julie. "Library Lights Out: EWU'S Living Learning Communities Leep Over at JFK Library," ACRL Washington News Letter, No. 65 (Fall) 2009 [electronic].

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ACRL Washington Newsletter

Spring 2010, No. 66

ACRL WA Newsletter
Spring 2010 , No. 66

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Library Lights Out: EWU's Living Learning Communities Sleep Over at JFK Library

by Dr. Julie Miller, Interim Dean of Libraries

Last February I received an unusual phone call. "What would you think about a group of students spending the night at the library?" asked Dr. Jeff Stafford, associate dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Eastern Washington University. "Tell me more," I replied. Shortly thereafter, I received a written proposal from Patricia Wahler, the community advisor (CA) for a student living learning community (LLC) at Morrison Hall at Eastern Washington University. Library Lights Out was Wahler's idea. "The Living Learning Communities of Morrison Hall would like an opportunity to utilize the Eastern Washington University library for a community-building program while incorporating educational aspects over the course of a Friday night," her proposal began.

Wahler provided a sound rationale for the event based on the goals of the living learning community program; she also provided a tentative schedule of events that included a pizza dinner, scavenger hunt, gaming, and movie

marathon. Approximately thirty students from four living learning communities would be joined by their four CAs, the Residence Life coordinator, Associate Dean Stafford, and someone from the library. I called Dr. Stafford and said, "The library is in. When can we meet to work out the logistics?"

Planning Library Lights Out

Carol King, the dean's assistant, coordinated the Library Lights Out event for JFK Library. We identified Friday, April 9, as the optimal date for both the students and the library. Wahler and Stafford toured the library with King and Rose Knight, the library building manager, to identify areas in which to hold activities as well as "off limit" areas. Knight notified custodial staff so their work would not be interrupted by the event, and she also worked with Circulation to minimize changes to closing procedures on the evening of April 9. King worked with the library's system technicians to set up workstations and a large-screen monitor for the gaming activities.

As interim dean, I was responsible for finding someone in the library to spend the night with the students. Justin Otto, reference and instruction librarian for the Social Sciences, was the perfect choice. Library Lights Out was a great opportunity for him to connect with students from the Social & Behavioral Sciences living learning

community, and as a tenure-track library faculty member, he was open to this great addition to his tenure portfolio. Otto exchanged e-mails with and met with Wahler to plan a scavenger hunt tailored to the LLCs.

Game On

Library Lights Out kicked off with a pizza party in the JFK Library staff training room at 6:00 pm on Friday, April 9 (library closing time). Student showed up with pillows and sleeping bags. Several VIPs attended the kick-off, including Stacey Morgan Foster, EWU's new vice president for Student Affairs. She was joined by the dean of students, associate dean of students, the directors of Housing and Residence Life. Dr. Sue Wright, a faculty member in Sociology, and Rick Davidson, the advisor for the College of Social & Behavioral Science, not only attended the



Dr. Jeffrey Stafford, kicking off the evening

kick-off, they spent the night as well. In addition to Justin Otto, the library was represented by the library student liaison and a student employee in Graphics who was the Library Lights Out photographer. I was on hand to welcome the students and to present each one with a library mug filled with candy, a library clip, and student-designed bookmark. Wahler did a terrific job of setting expectations for the event, reminding participants about the student code of conduct.

After the pizza party, the students moved to the library lobby for an ice-breaker activity. Then it was game on. The library scavenger hunt kicked off at 8:15 and continued throughout the evening. Justin Otto used the library's public address system to give clues to the hunt. Wahler said the scavenger hunt was fun and achieved the LLC goals to use the library in a friendly and competitive way.



Justin Otto with students playing video games

Additionally, students could choose to participate in different activities on each level of the library. A film marathon took place on the Lower Level, where LCD projectors in the library instruction room and a meeting room were repurposed to screen movies. The Main Level of the library was the primary location for games, including Wii Mario Kart/Smash Brothers, Dungeon and Dragons, and cards. The Upper Level was the site for a game of Assassins.

According to Wahler, the most fun part of the evening was when a group of ten students invited her to play an impromptu game of Capture the Flag. "This proved the residents were having a good time and were taking advantage of the environment we provided. I truly appreciated their attitudes and initiative." The LLC members were

joined by three community advisors and Otto, Wright, and Davidson. As Davidson commented later, "Nothing like playing an energetic game of capture the flag before retiring to a library study cubicle. It was fun!"

Eventually, activities wound down, and everyone found quiet spots to sleep. At about 7:00 am, students began to show up in the staff training room for juice and pastries. Although a few were tired and cranky, they cleaned up and moved furniture back to its original locations. When the library opened at 12:00 pm on Saturday, no one would have guessed it had been the scene of an all-night party!

The Take-Away

Library Lights Out was a great collaboration between Student Affairs and EWU Libraries. The library received big kudos for being open to this student-initiated activity, including thank-you cards from the vice president for Student Affairs, the dean of students, Tricia Wahler, and others. Justin Otto will have a terrific letter of appreciation from Associate Dean Stafford to include in his tenure and promotion portfolio, and the two of them are planning to collaborate on an article. Most importantly, according to Wahler the students really appreciated this opportunity to experience the library in a different way. They now have bragging rights as the Library Lights Out Class of 2010.

For more information, contact Julie Miller at jmiller7@ewu.edu.