

Chapter 15

Peer-to-Peer Outreach and Promotion

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers both examples and recommendations for involving undergraduate students in academic library outreach efforts. Librarians at Gustavus Adolphus College employ a variety of methods for connecting with undergraduate students through their peers. Specifically, an internship program is described, along with initiatives developed through collaboration with student organizations on campus. In addition, the relationship between outreach efforts and the educational mission of academic libraries is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Gustavus Adolphus College is a small private liberal arts college in Minnesota located about an hour south of Minneapolis-St. Paul. It is a strictly undergraduate institution, with approximately 2,500 students enrolled on a full-time basis. As is the case for many other libraries, finding the time, funding, and staff for effective marketing and outreach can be a struggle. The Gustavus library does not have a budget line for marketing, nor is there a staff position solely devoted to outreach. Even if library staff members have an interest in outreach or an aptitude for graphic design, planning events and creating advertising takes time away from staff members' regular work. Furthermore, an idea that seems innovative and fun to library staff might not hold the same appeal for college students. Recognizing these limitations and the advantages of peer-to-peer outreach, the librarians and staff at Gustavus have utilized undergraduate interns and collaborated with campus organizations to sponsor events and promote library resources and services.

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BACKGROUND

Building community through collaboration with undergraduate students can take many forms, ranging from purely social events to more academic or instruction-related initiatives and everything in between. Many libraries work closely with student affairs personnel to plan events or promote services; for example, collaborating with the student activities office when planning new student orientation. Likewise, libraries may coordinate with admissions staff to offer training sessions or provide information for campus tour guides. Often, librarians utilize their own peer networks to reach students, working with faculty and staff members. As more libraries develop peer-to-peer service models, perhaps it is worth exploring other opportunities to engage students in library outreach and promotion efforts. The Gustavus library has taken steps toward facilitating peer-to-peer outreach by creating undergraduate internship programs and developing relationships with student organizations.

While much of the literature on library internships has focused on graduate student interns, Dahl (2011a, 2011b) describes an internship program for undergraduate students in an English honors program, including detailed information on the creation of such a program and supervision of interns. Similarly, an undergraduate internship program at Brigham Young University introduces students to librarianship, along with special collections and archival work (Kopp & Murphy, 2012; Smith, 2010). Other libraries have designed undergraduate internship programs for minority students that are intended to help recruit a diverse group of future librarians (Angell, Evans, & Nicolas, 2012; Asher & Alexander, 2006). A librarian at the University of Washington recruited business majors for a library internship program in which the students created tutorials, designed research guides, and offered peer tutoring (Harwood & McCormack, 2008). Musselman Library at West Chester University offers undergraduate internship programs in music, reference, and special collections; Sestrick and Terjesen (2014) describe the structure of the internships, along with qualitative data from former interns. Brown and Murphy (2005) studied the internship experiences of students enrolled in an undergraduate information studies program at the University of Oklahoma. The University of Pittsburgh library system has also engaged undergraduate students in library projects, including history majors hired to edit Wikipedia articles related to the university's digital collections and primary source material (Galloway & DellaCorte, 2014).

A survey of the existing literature did not uncover any studies describing a marketing internship program, though there are several articles related to outreach and promotion efforts involving undergraduates. For example, Miller (2011) describes a library student liaison program where an undergraduate student is employed part-time "as a member of the administrative team to serve as a voice for students within the library and a voice for the library within the student body" (p. 2). Likewise, the Marketing Team at the University of Maine includes student members (Gfeller, Butterfield-Nagy, & Grignon, 2011). Several libraries have partnered with Elsevier to offer a "Student Ambassador Program," an initiative in which both graduate and undergraduate students are hired and trained to market library database services (see, for example, Betz, Brown, Barberi, & Langendorfer, 2009 and Collins & Bredahl, 2011). Smith and Reynolds (2008) provide a unique example of peer-to-peer outreach: a guerilla marketing campaign utilizing street teams comprised of student volunteers. The American Library Association turned to undergraduate students in the design program at the University of Illinois-Chicago when trying to craft an advertising campaign (Kelly, 1997). Finally, students in the Peer Information Counseling (PIC) program at the University of Arizona are trained in marketing, offering presentations and promoting their services on campus (Norlin, 2001).

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