Chapter 5
Building a Community of the Students, by the Students, for the Students:
Collaborating with Student Government Organizations

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Mansfield Library has developed a strong interest in engaging its undergraduate student community. In addition to developing more events and programming specifically for undergraduates, librarians have pursued increased interaction with students via social media and through work with non-academic partners. And, like many academic libraries, the Mansfield Library has implemented an institutional repository for campus scholarship. This chapter will focus on the convergence of these endeavors and describe how librarians employed the institutional repository to more fully engage the undergraduate student body government.

INTRODUCTION

Like many academic libraries, the Mansfield Library at the University of Montana (UM) has a keen interest in engaging its undergraduate student community. Alongside attempts to invigorate traditional instruction, librarians have increased the number of events, exhibits, social functions, and programs designed for and offered to undergraduates. They have become more interactive on social media networks and have pursued outreach to undergraduate students through non-academic partners. And, like many academic libraries, the Mansfield Library has channeled and accomplished these general community development activities largely through the structure of traditional liaison outreach.

As a liaison, the Undergraduate Services Librarian (USL) works with several student groups on campus, including UM's student body government, the Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUM). While the traditional liaison model helped form a relationship between the library and ASUM, the USL sensed that outreach to this group was inadequate and needed to expand beyond the liaison structure. For several years the library had engaged in activities with the student body. Activities included hosting social events for ASUM students, inviting ASUM's participation in building design and strategic planning conversations and processes, and asking for feedback whenever major changes related to the library were proposed. The result was a traditional liaison relationship with a campus group, but it lacked the strong collaboration and sense of reciprocity and dialogue necessary for true community engagement.

An unexpected opportunity arose to explore and build a more integrated, authentic partnership with ASUM with the concurrence of two seemingly unrelated events. First, the student body, prompted by an increased local interest in their past activities and decisions related to a controversial new building proposal, requested the digitization of their historical records by library staff. Second, the library acquired an institutional repository (IR) platform. After implementation of the IR, an activity in which the Digital Initiatives Librarian (DIL) and Digital Archivist (DA) were heavily involved, the DIL, DA, and USL began to think about how a digital collection for ASUM within the IR would not only enhance access for ASUM students by allowing them to search and use their digitized historical records, but could also enable them to actively manage and preserve their governing documents into the future.

The resulting project would consist of part digitization project and part IR collection development and management. Outcomes of the project included digital products and collections as well as lessons learned and new insights about creating and managing a digital collection that has student governance and administration as its primary function. But the project would also become something much more as it demonstrated the value of community engagement for producing project outcomes, for long-term relationship-building, and for refining and improving library processes and services. This chapter will outline the steps taken to develop and implement the project for ASUM. It will explain both how the project activities helped to establish a new kind of collaboration with the student body government that resulted in a strengthened relationship with the library, and how engaging with ASUM helped establish new methods and modes of working within the library that will help the library provide better services to its communities.

In addition to the positive impact on relationships with external communities, community building activities can also result in unexpected, but important benefits for academic libraries' internal communities. Collaborative engagement with the student body government provided the opportunity for librarians from traditionally separate areas of the library (instruction, archives and access services) to work together,

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