

Chapter 10

Let Them Eat King Cake: An Open House Pilot Event at LSU Libraries

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the planning, promotion, implementation, and assessment of the first LSU Libraries open house event. A review of the literature suggests that academic libraries that promote their services through open houses reap positive benefits, such as increased student awareness of library services and resources. Even though the Libraries has had an operating outreach services program since 1997, an event that comprehensively provided opportunities for the University community to interact with various Libraries departments and staff had not been attempted. An ad hoc open house committee formed to plan, promote, and recruit Libraries departments, University units, and volunteers for the event. The positive response to the open house exceeded the committee and the administration's expectations. Issues during planning and implementation were identified that are now serving as goals and objectives for future open house events.

INTRODUCTION

As part of an ongoing effort to engage with campus communities, Louisiana State University (LSU) Libraries undertook its first open house event. Innovative and collaborative thinking was required to organize a successful open house event. While campus-wide events had been coordinated by other LSU

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entities, the open house was the first outreach event of this scale undertaken by the Libraries. All aspects of coordinating the event, from planning to assessment, required the integration of various stakeholders from within the Libraries and beyond. While the focus of the open house was to inform students of resources and services, the aim of the event was to be entertaining and educational. The open house was determined to be a success, but with lessons learned that will be taken into consideration when planning future events.

BACKGROUND

Located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, LSU Libraries provide support for the research, teaching, and service missions of the University, Louisiana's flagship research institution and its only public Carnegie Research University (very high research activity). The Libraries consist of two major collections, the Main Collection, housed in Middleton library, and Special Collections, housed in Hill Memorial library. A number of University departments also have offices and service points within Middleton: an Information Technology Services (IT Services) Help Desk, the Center for Academic Success (CAS) Tutorial Center, a Print Services location that offers large-format printing services, and the Faculty Technology Center (FTC). Middleton also provides computer labs for student, faculty, and staff use, as well as collaborative study spaces and presentation practice rooms. LSU's 30,000 students make extensive use of Middleton library: gate count data collected by the circulation department show that 985,541 entrances were recorded during the 2013-2014 academic year.

The LSU Libraries Research and Instruction Services (RIS) department is primarily responsible for outreach efforts to the University and to the University's larger stakeholder communities throughout the state. In 1997, the Libraries initiated an outreach services program specifically targeting the academic research needs of minority and international students (Griffin, 2000). Since the creation of this program and the expansion of its scope to the entire University community, an outreach librarian has ensured the Libraries' presence at University events. Due to the constant supply of University programming throughout the fall, spring, and summer semesters, outreach is a major service the Libraries provide to the University. Recently, the demand for tours of the Libraries from groups outside of the University, such as local schools, has increased as the demand for services and programs to assist students in the transition to college has expanded on campus. Over a course of a recent six-year period, 2007-2012, the Libraries participated in 258 outreach events. During the 2013-2014 academic year alone, the Libraries participated in fifty-eight outreach events and made contact with over 8,500 users.

To identify outreach programming and participation opportunities, the outreach librarian has worked with the Libraries' outreach services committee. Recently, the Libraries have endured a number of staffing shortages which have resulted in this committee falling into a period of inactivity. Even though the outreach librarian continued to attend University events, outreach efforts had become focused exclusively on responding to event invitations rather than proactively designing events and programs that promote the Libraries to the University. To improve upon this state of affairs, the outreach services committee was revived in 2013 and was tasked with outlining a mission statement and a list of goals and objectives for the committee to pursue. The committee defined the scope of its activities and created a mission statement that generalized its charge, which was to promote the Libraries' services and resources to the University community and to the general public (Fontenot, 2013). The committee worked closely with a marketing task force created to promote awareness and to increase use of the Libraries' resources and services, particularly focusing on the suite of services provided by the RIS department.

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