

Cultivating connections: Growing internationalization in your university

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Abstract

International student outreach should encompass all aspects of librarianship. A necessary step in this process includes aligning engagement efforts with those of the larger academic institution. At the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, one of the most prominent campus-wide initiatives has been making the campus “Ready for the World.” This paper outlines methods of integrating the library into the larger university outreach goals for internationalization, including the integration into existing programs, co-hosting international events, and offering independent library programs to serve international initiatives.

Keywords

- academic libraries
- cultural programming
- engagement
- collaboration
- college students
- international students

Introduction

International outreach includes all aspects of library work intended to prepare users for an increasingly globally connected world. With so many service learning classes, study abroad programs, and international students, the libraries’ integration into existing classes, programs, and departments is essential for the students to gain a global perspective and prepare for their varied multicultural experiences. For international students at the university, library services and programs should aim to reduce anxiety, increase comfort in using materials, provide useful resources, and relay information to this particular populace in a culturally sensitive way. For domestic students, offering some of the same resources can make them prepared to study, serve, or conduct business abroad.

Integrate Libraries into Existing Programs

It takes a considerable amount of networking to fuel the planning and implementation of successful international programs (Bordonaro, 2013). For librarians, this extends a lot further than simply promoting programs within the library. Rather, it entails continuous effort to locate and engage a multitude of constituents across the campus. At the University of Tennessee (UT), librarians regularly attend cultural programs and events on campus, going so far as asking library administration for funding to attend ticketed events for the networking opportunities they provide. At these events, making connections and friendships broaden the knowledge of the library and possible programming opportunities. If those programming opportunities already exist, they also provide a way for the library to insert its influence into other areas of the university.

This is not to say, however, that the library should be involved in every program on campus. Rather, librarians should identify outside programs and events that align with the library strategic plan by getting to know the program organizers and learning the purpose and mission of other campus entities. Such exploration is necessary before volunteering library services and participating to optimize the investment of library time and funding. Furthermore, librarians are in a better position to offer concrete solutions and ideas that are beneficial to all partners involved.

Examples of Successful Integrated Programming

The University of Tennessee Libraries has a long history of aligning their activities with other international organizations on campus. In 2016, the UT Libraries joined with the campus International House in their long-time program, the International Coffeehouses. Once a week during the Fall and Spring semesters, an international student organization hosted their country's coffeehouse, including food, coffee and friends. The director of the International House was aware of the popularity of the event among the campus population but noted a lack of substantial educational value to the event. A library graduate student worker who frequented the event had the idea that the library have a presence at the events and bring some reading materials to make them more academic in nature. Over time, the library presence has grown into a full partnership. The International House provides money, international organizations, and food. The library provides space for the weekly event and showcases a collection of materials based on the country of the week, which includes selected music from the UT DeVine Music Library. This growing partnership has become a staple of the campus and the library. By volunteering time and resources to external programs, the UT Libraries has become not only an invaluable part of these programs, but also an inseparable one.



International Education Librarian Allison Sharp, University Chancellor Beverly Davenport, Music Librarian Nathalie Hristov, and Public Services Librarian Amanda Sexton in front of the library display at the UT International Coffeehouse.

In the world of program planning, a single spark of library involvement can always grow into new and

exciting partnerships. After the increased success of the International Coffeehouse, the UT Libraries became involved with another international event, the World Showcase. Three times a semester, this particular series of events was coordinated around a single country. This string of events includes several engaging activities for students, staff, and the community, including cooking demonstrations, dancing, film showings, and a traditional dinner of the country held in the International House. The library takes a leading role in exhibits during the dinner, demonstrating books, movies, music, and other library resources relating to the country. After the exhibits are complete, librarians and library students also participate in the events, games, and dancing, while cultivating connections with the UT community. In this way, the UT Libraries spreads information of the resources available to students, including approachable and knowledgeable librarians.

These networking opportunities are the fuel for the fire of international outreach, connecting campus organizations, departments, and people with the library with the same goals. With this in mind, it is imperative for librarians to become common faces within cultural programs and events on campus, get to know the program organizers, and eventually volunteer library services and participation tailored to the program objectives.

Seek Partners to Co-host International, Cultural Programs

Within any large institution of higher education, several academic units often work independently in pursuit of similar goals and objectives. Even the highest level of expertise in one's discipline can be insufficient to disseminate essential information to the broader community of affiliated interest groups. For example, a modern foreign language department may try to prepare students for study abroad by emphasizing language instruction. However, language experts may be unable to provide the cultural competencies that another department offers, such as Latin American studies, or the Department of Religious Studies. It is at this point that libraries may offer a bridge connecting two disciplines to create a more holistic experience for students. In a 2018 article, "Build a New Village," Susan Benton finds that, "[a]n integrated, intentional approach to learning has

to begin early, draw on a wide variety of resources, and extend beyond the classroom.” (p. 21)

One common denominator among the different departments in an academic institution is the library. Working with faculty and students from different departments, librarians are often the first to see where redundancies in instruction and services lie, as well as the common threads different departments share in terms of challenges and objectives. With a wealth of information resources at their fingertips and a keen understanding of the similar issues plaguing different departments, librarians have a unique opportunity to create strategies and solutions to benefit all. As Benton (2018) concluded, “Failing to leverage the library’s broad capacities and community connections is a missed opportunity when the learning needs are so great” (p. 21).

Identifying Partners

At the University of Tennessee, librarians from different departments meet regularly to share experiences working with the individual departments they serve. During these meetings, the librarians realized that several departments were working on similar initiatives to provide students with a more international experience and education. For example, the Departments of Religious Studies and Modern Foreign Languages shared the goal of promoting Arab history and culture to the community in order to build greater awareness, tolerance, and understanding of a culture that may not be fairly represented in society. Together, these two distinct departments gave rise to the annual Arab Fest in which the Libraries became an integral component. After a few successful years of hosting the festival, other departments joined in, such as the School of Music with their Middle Eastern Ensemble. Once again, the libraries served as a lynchpin that brought diverse groups and department together.

Another example of an entity that benefits from library collaboration is the International House, a center for international students to congregate under the auspices of the Center for International Education. The International House staff and students wanted to showcase the different cultures represented at the University of Tennessee by offering a weekly “coffeehouse” where students from the showcased region would offer traditional foods and coffee to the rest of the campus community. The UT Libraries

offered a space with an adjacent kitchenette that would allow them to host their event in a high traffic area within the Libraries. Additionally, librarians added an educational component offering an exhibit and display of library resources for the featured country for each of these weekly events.



Music Librarian Nathalie Hristov, Knoxville, Tennessee Mayor Madeline Rogero, and International Education Librarian Allison Sharp in front of a display for the annual Arab Fest.

Offer Spaces, Administrative Support, and Collections

Library spaces such as auditoriums, lecture halls, galleries, and open foyers naturally lend themselves to these types of community showcases and events, as do collections. As in the case of the of the International House’s weekly Coffeehouses, the Libraries provided spaces for all kinds of events such as exhibits, lectures, and even film series for other departments throughout the campus. Additionally, the Libraries added valuable educational components to the coffeehouses through their informative displays and exhibits. By staffing the exhibits at these weekly events, librarians also engaged with the community and gained valuable insight as to the information needs of faculty and students, as well as ideas for other cultural programs to benefit the community.

Share Financial/Grant-writing Responsibilities for the Program

One of the biggest challenges to cultural programming is funding. With ever-tightening budgets, any type of programming that is not directly related to education may not be considered a high priority by departments. When funds are not allotted, the scope and impact of the program may suffer from

insufficient funding. Libraries can alleviate some of the financial burden to academic departments by offering resources from our existing collections, clerical support, and in some cases, a small financial contribution. However, one of the most impactful ways libraries can contribute to the financial health of a cultural program is through shared grant-writing responsibilities.

Peter Kraus from the University of Utah found that “[a] modest investment in grants education for a public services librarian has resulted in a value-added service offered at two libraries on the campus of the University of Utah. This has led to an unexpected avenue of outreach and an increase in instruction for both libraries through offering additional classes and promoting the collections and services of the libraries” (Kraus, 2007, p.2). Librarians have access to foundation directories and other grant funding agencies to identify appropriate potential sources of revenue for existing and/or future programs. With a little bit of training, librarians can take the lead in the grant-writing activities of departments that would benefit from cultural programs.

Design Mutually Beneficial Programs to the Libraries and Co-Host



Graduate Library Assistant Kathryn Shepas wears traditional Korean dress provided by the Knoxville Area Korean Association while staffing the library display during the *University of Tennessee Ready for the World Series: Koreana* program.

At the University of Tennessee, a music librarian co-wrote with an applied music faculty member several grant proposals to host the University of Tennessee Ready for the World Music Series program. Without the grant-writing expertise of the librarian,

the program and its current standing in the community would not have been possible.

The University of Tennessee Ready for the World Music Series is a program held three times a year and co-hosted by the UT School of Music and the UT Libraries. One of the challenges faced by the UT Music Library is a serious lack of space for collections, let alone to host exhibits, lectures, or any other type of program that would lend it the visibility it deserves. At the same time, we have collections, services, and even social networks that would support dynamic, multi-faceted, and engaging programs to attract audiences. By working together, we designed a program that was mutually beneficial to both the Libraries and the School of Music, leveraging the resources and expertise of each.

Independent Library Programs and Collections

In addition to collaborative programming, there are many other ways the university library can promote internationalization among its users, particularly by providing resources and services. In a global society, universities need to provide collections that support the multi-cultural learning goals of both international and domestic students.

Language Learning Software

One tool that can help is language learning software in the library. The University of Tennessee began experimenting with this by offering a limited number of site licenses for Rosetta Stone. These were available to five people who had to apply for these few spots. The demand outpaced the few licenses, so the Libraries expanded to nine licenses which were closely monitored for use; if an account was inactive for six months, that account was terminated to allow other users access. The demand was so great that the Libraries made the decision to provide a campus-wide site license.

There are a variety of other language learning tools available, including the popular and library-tailored Mango Languages. The UT Libraries offered a trial subscription of Mango, while surveying users on both Rosetta Stone and Mango. Although Mango and Rosetta Stone are similar in function, they both offer unique features not available in the other program. One feature that users commented that they found particularly helpful were movies subtitled in both the native language and the target language, with scene-

by-scene playback in Mango. Others who preferred Mango liked the cultural context in which the lessons were set. Rosetta Stone admirers preferred the settings that could be applied to make the speech recognition either less strict, which makes it very useful for users with speech difficulties or for those who absolutely need to be understood clearly like those in the military.

Both of these tools offer a wide selection of languages and dialects useful for domestic students who want to learn a language we don't teach. Additionally, both offer English as a Second Language programs for international students who want to improve their English.

Library Collections

Another aspect that plays into international outreach is collection development. It is not usually the first thing anyone thinks of when considering outreach, but it is vastly important. As was mentioned earlier, we partner with the International House on a weekly coffeehouse, each of which features a different country. The library exhibits our resources on the highlighted country, but it can be extremely difficult if we don't have books or databases covering that country. For example, there are many academic and cultural books, databases, films, music, and more on France and Italy; while there are almost none on Bulgaria. How will domestic students learn about these lesser known countries if we don't provide the resources? How will the Bulgarian students feel when they see their exhibit compared to France? It's important to fill these obvious gaps when found in library collections so each culture can be fairly and equally represented.

Streaming collections are equally important. They offer worldwide media that can make a student feel more at home or can teach a domestic student about a country's culture and language. Streaming databases of world music and foreign-film streaming services are often used in classes to educate students, and by students interested in the culture to learn casually and independently. They are also used frequently in library programming. The streaming music is featured at the weekly coffeehouses to set the mood for the country and teach students about famous composers from the area. The streaming films are used both by the library and by the Modern Foreign Languages department in various film series

and showings offered throughout the year (when licensing allows).

Frequently, the impetus to add particularly focused materials arrives from faculty and staff who request specific books; they have a desire for the librarian to build a collection around an exhibit, for a specific class, or for their research interests. Recently the Africana Studies and English departments requested the library partner with them for an Afro-futurism conference featuring Nnedi Okorafor, an international award-winning Nigerian-American author of African science fiction, fantasy, and magical realism. The library collection only held two of her books. A closer examination of the collection revealed that the library held only a few books from the very biggest names in Afro-futurism, and most of our books were focused on traditional science fiction and fantasy from authors like Isaac Asimov and Ursula Le Guin. There was one lost copy of a book by Octavia Butler, a Hugo award winning African American science fiction author. This was an opportunity to really develop the African science fiction / fantasy collection, with a focus on Africa and women writers. This conference and library exhibit were extremely popular, and the library was able to show its collection of Afro-futuristic books, criticisms, and films. The exhibit had to be rearranged frequently because books were checked out from it daily. This was clearly an area that needed to be developed, but without the organizer's request for an exhibit, it may never have happened.

Targeted Library Sessions

The collections and language-learning software are services that help both international and domestic students. An area of focus related solely to international students is the targeted library information sessions for them. These are available for students enrolled in pre-admission language programs all the way through graduate students and visiting scholars. Tours, orientations, class sessions, general research workshops, and specialized workshops are provided, too. In the past, some have been offered in multiple languages, and that is a goal going forward. All entering graduate and undergraduate students are offered a general orientation session when they arrive at the university. Visiting scholars receive individual or small group consultations, ESL English composition faculty request specific library instruction related to the

major projects for the class, and the Writing Center requests general research advice to international graduate students writing theses and dissertations. The libraries have begun offering the ever-popular EndNote workshops in targeted sessions for non-native English speakers.

Solicit Feedback

Feedback in all things is of the utmost importance. One of the most common forms is through casual feedback in face to face or online communication. Not everyone is comfortable expressing themselves or identifying themselves when asking questions or providing feedback, so for some outreach events, there are official surveys from which the success of the event can be determined. In some classes, students are encouraged to write down questions they have at the beginning of class, so that the session can be tailored to their needs. Conversely, having them write down any suggestions classes is informative for future instruction.

The most important feedback will be from a representative sampling of international students at the university. To this end, a research study involving open houses and focus groups for international students is in development. It is anticipated that student groups will answer a survey then participate in a focused conversation providing the library with a treasure trove of information about their experiences with research in general, the university, and most specifically about the library. The goal is to learn what actions to take to improve the libraries services to international students, and to determine how much a role different cultural identities play in international students' experiences.

Conclusion

Studies have clearly shown that there is an imperative for academic libraries to engage more meaningfully with their campus community. (Schlak, 2018; Shapiro, 2016). At the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, each and every department is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in one way or another. The Libraries can serve the campus community by partnering with individual departments to offer and support programs and initiatives in line with these efforts, thus easing the burden to many. The program ideas presented in these proceedings are only a few ways librarians can

reach out to the campus community to support international/ intercultural ideas. However, the most crucial point is that it is up to librarians to reach out to departments and offer them what they need rather than asking them what they want. From these experiences, UT librarians have learned to research what colleagues in other academic departments are doing and learn where they are coming from before making offers of help and collaboration.

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