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## SUCCESSFUL LIAISON MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR LIBRARY INSTRUCTION: THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

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### Introduction

There are many tried and true forms of marketing libraries today. Networking, emailing, calling, and requesting an audience with a department are all common practices. The key to successfully utilizing these practices in your liaison areas is persistence.

Last year, Kimbel Library's instruction program reached an astounding 97% of first year students. In addition, the instruction program increased the number of upper division courses taught to account for 25% of the program's instruction load (Kimbel Library, 2006). One of the main reasons the instruction program has been so successful is the high visibility of our instruction librarians. Since the library is rather small, all the librarians in the public services department both teach and serve as liaisons to various departments. In the role of liaison, the librarians are responsible for collection management as well as instruction. Additionally, since the librarians at Kimbel Library have faculty status, they are able to network with various faculty members through committee appointments, meeting, and other activities.

Any opportunity to be in front of a group, whether it is students or faculty, is seized. Forums include providing workshops for various programs such as Lifelong Learning, attending department meetings, visiting faculty at least once a semester, participating in training sessions like New Faculty Orientation, and volunteering to speak at Fall Freshman Orientation. Opportunities for exposure are always plentiful provided you keep an open mind about where to look.

### Marketing in Writing

One of the major challenges of strengthening liaison relationships is to ensure proper marketing to your target audience. In order to make sure your information is being relayed properly, take the time to explore the communication preferences of your contacts. One way to do this is to split your marketing tactics into two methods; the written word and in-person contact. Creating the written word is probably the most common method that librarians use to inform constituents of new services and policies. The easiest method of communication and the most preferred, according to Tennant, Cataldo, Sherwill-Navarro & Jesano (2006), is email. This makes sense given the amount of time faculty devote to the online environment and the relative convenience of wireless internet. Usually, email lends itself best to quick follow ups such as which database to showcase or confirming the date and time of your instruction. Email is also the most effective means of updating your faculty about new products or changes to services offered. Although email is the most common means of communication, it is not without its pitfalls. One of the common issues that arises when relying on email is the possibility of leaving someone off of the distribution list (Tennant, Cataldo, Sherwill-Navarro & Jesano, 2006). This can happen for a variety of reasons (error in the address or new faculty not yet added to the list) and can take some time to correct once or even if it is identified. Additionally, faculty are often inundated with email which means the sender runs the risk of the message being blocked, deleted or pushed to the bottom of the pile.

To curtail the risk of solely relying on email as your method of contact, creating flyers at the beginning of each semester is another option. This method has proved incredibly valuable to Kimbel Library liaisons. Whereas it is easier to focus an email to a single topic, creating a flyer allows a library to summarize a variety of services or products into one neat package. This medium is also updatable and can serve as a template for future semesters. Using a flyer in addition to email is important because it provides something tangible for the faculty member. They can post the flyer to their door, desk, corkboard, or wherever they are most likely to look for updates or quick reference of information. Handouts or flyers also afford the opportunity to make your presence known. Getting in front of your faculty is one of the most important things you can do. Personally distributing handouts, is an easy way to introduce yourself to new faculty and remind others that you are there to support them. It reinforces to the faculty that the librarians are real and available to them outside of the library. As David Issacson notes about face to face contact, "The social part of this [first] liaison meeting is critical to the success of the intellectual exchanges between librarian and new faculty members. Librarians are much more likely to persuade faculty to consult us about sources they want to acquire or library instruction sessions they want us to teach if we establish this personal rapport first."

### Marketing In Person

#### *Focusing on Faculty*

Although distributing flyers once a semester is a good start toward building relationships, participating in campus events and workshops is one of the most effective means of marketing yourself to the faculty. Not only does participation show your involvement to the larger campus community, but it also affords you the opportunity to meet faculty outside of your liaison areas as well. Networking with various faculty can help to build your credibility and can generate a positive buzz about you better than you can do by yourself.

One of the biggest PR boosters to the Kimbel

Library instruction program was working with faculty to integrate an instruction component into the development of the course University 110. This course is required of all incoming freshmen. When the Provost mandated a complete revamp of the university's freshman course, the library was very proactive in becoming integrated into the curriculum. Two members of the Reference Department served on the committee in various capacities to ensure that the library was included. It was not enough to get instruction onto the syllabus; the library needed to generate faculty buy-in. This component was especially important given the participation of faculty from various areas of campus, many of whom had never used the library for instruction before. When marketing library services to new or unfamiliar faculty, it is essential they understand what instruction can do for them and their students.

The primary way Kimbel Library focused on getting the faculty to actually complete the instruction was to participate during the faculty training sessions. This session was based on what Christy Stevens calls the "teach the teachers model" (2006). Although much of the content focused on the library requirements for the class, the librarians delivered the presentation as a mock instruction session to give the faculty a feel for what their session would be like. In addition to discussing how and why the library was being tied in, the librarians also had the faculty take a module of the library tutorial their students would be completing. Doing the sessions this way was important because it would allow the faculty to see the content students were getting and thus give them the ability to answer routine questions. Actually bringing the faculty into the classroom established an open dialogue and reinforced the idea that the librarians were there to assist and support them in all of their classes. Faculty left with the contact information of all of the teaching librarians (all of whom participated in at least one training session) and were able to contact either the Assistant Library Instruction Coordinator or their liaison directly to schedule their session and consult about assignments. Maintaining close follow up was integral to the success of the program. Over the course of the

fall semester, the Assistant Library Instruction Coordinator tracked the instructors who visited the library and was very proactive in following up with those who needed a bit more encouragement. Due to the combination of the initial training and continuous follow ups, the library was able to teach 63 of the 64 course sections. However, all of the classes at least came into the library. Since the University 110 course was discipline specific, it allowed the library to reach students in colleges which typically did not fully utilize the library's resources. Additionally, the librarians were able to establish connections with various faculty members both in their liaison areas as well as across campus. The librarians found that once faculty got comfortable with the idea of using the library, many became the program's biggest advocates during the following year's training session.

In addition to participating in the University 110 training, the library has also actively established itself as a part of the University's New Faculty Orientation series. During the fall semester, the library presents an overview of services that might be helpful to new faculty. All areas from collection development to instruction are addressed, including how to contact their departmental liaison. Participating in these sessions provides a great opportunity to allow faculty to ask questions as well as to physically assimilate themselves to the building and the people in it.

Providing specific training workshops for faculty is also a great way to market instruction skills. Typically, when a new database is purchased or a major policy change is implemented (e.g., moving non-book/media course reserves online) the librarians try to offer workshops through the Center for Effective Teaching & Learning (CETL) to inform faculty. Depending on the focus of the database, this is a great way to get in front of your liaison area. When presenting the new features or best searching strategies, make sure to emphasize how great this will be not only for their research, but how useful it will be for their students as well. Getting faculty to realize how much the workshop has helped them is a great stepping stone to getting them to let you

present to their classes. Just like in the business world, center the focus of the conversation on how this service will benefit their curriculum goals and expectations, not on your desire to get their students into the library.

Aside from providing training sessions and actual instruction, attending departmental annual or semester meetings is an easy and quick way to promote your program. This provides a forum for you to address your entire faculty at one time, which is usually a feat in itself. Speaking at department meetings can be especially effective if you have already done an instruction session for a member of that department. Usually faculty are very quick to say how much the instruction session helped their students. Having an ally to back up your pitch instantly boosts your credibility.

Word of mouth has been the number one form of publicity for Kimbel Library. The librarians continually receive phone calls to schedule instruction from new faculty who have been told by a colleague or mentor how useful they have found the library's sessions in the past. Utilizing contacts you have previously made to get referrals is a smart move. Not only does this process verify that people are using your services, but it provides a perspective outside of your own. These conversations can take place anywhere (campus luncheons, information fairs, etc). The key component to keep in mind is making your "sales pitch" brief and following up with the faculty member later. By following up instead of trying to schedule the session then, you alleviate any pressure the faculty member might feel and allow them time to assess how an instruction session might best fit their course. Even if they do not utilize instruction immediately, the important part is that you have established a dialogue that can lead to further discussion in the future.

#### *Focusing on Students*

Participating in events outside of the academic realm can create great contacts. Often times community members or Directors of programs not affiliated with particular departments can be great advocates for your instruction program.

This will not only help to solidify your status on campus, but can assist your library in making partnerships across the community.

Agreeing to play a small part in a large campus event can have a great impact on not just instruction, but all areas of the library. One of the easiest ways to promote your library or program is to get involved with fall orientation. The commitment can be small. Several of our reference librarians gave 10 minute overviews of the library and its services simultaneously during one of the scheduled orientation sessions. Not only did the librarians manage to promote the library to a significant number of incoming students, but they had a forum to remind the faculty and staff in attendance of all the library has to offer. The overview was brief, but also effective. Sometimes a quick reminder is all people need to pique their interest and motivate them to find out more information.

Looking to strengthen community ties led to several opportunities to work with non-traditional student constituencies. Several of the instruction librarians have participated in training workshops for programs like the Lifelong Learning program, which focuses on continuing education for adults. Typically, this program focuses on continuing education courses for the surrounding community. The librarians offered to provide a one hour overview of library resources in addition to providing general question and answer opportunities during their three day orientation session. Although these sessions were not as well attended as typical instruction sessions, they provided a means to establish good working partnerships with the Directors of this program. Similarly, on occasion one of the librarians offers a special instruction session for the local high school's media club and advanced placement classes. Students are introduced to various college level materials. The library in turn is able to offer a community service type collaboration with the local school district. Developing partnerships outside the university allows your program to become well rounded and allows instructors the opportunity to participate in a community service capacity. This balance can be helpful when validating your

program to reluctant faculty or upper administration.

## Conclusion

Creative approaches to marketing instruction to your liaison areas are a challenging, but highly lucrative practice. It is important to note that generating faculty buy-in involves long term effort. Kimbel Library's success is a testament to the sustained energy put into the program over the years and the continuous effort of its faculty to seek opportunities to market their program and build upon prior successes (Fain, Stevens, & Bates, 2002). Building relationships and creating positive word of mouth are some of your strongest marketing tools. Create strong enough buy-in and eventually your market will come to you, as evidenced with the Kimbel Library program. Finding unique circumstances to promote your library's services can come in a wide variety of opportunities. However, a key component to any successful liaison venture is to make yourself and your services as visible and accessible as possible. The proof is in the pudding they say. Remember, marketing the liaison relationship starts with you.

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