

7-3-2017

Creating a Culture of Grant Writing in a Multi-Campus Academic Setting

Christopher Shaffer

Troy University, shafferc@troy.edu

Michael Pearce

University of Alabama, pearc007@ua.edu

Alyssa Martin

Troy University, almartin@troy.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shaffer, Christopher; Pearce, Michael; and Martin, Alyssa (2017) "Creating a Culture of Grant Writing in a Multi-Campus Academic Setting," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 65 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol65/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Creating a Culture of Grant Writing in a Multi-Campus Academic Setting

Christopher Shaffer, Michael Pearce, Alyssa Martin

Christopher Shaffer is the Dean of Library Services at Troy University Library and can be reached at shafferc@troy.edu. Michael Pearce is the Head of Gorgas Information Services at the University of Alabama Libraries and can be reached at pearc007@ua.edu. Alyssa Martin is the Instruction/Reference Librarian at Troy University Library and can be reached at almartin@troy.edu

Introduction

Grant writing is more important than ever in an era of “proving our worth” at academic libraries. For small libraries wanting to provide their communities with unique programming opportunities, such grant writing is often essential, because the funding for programming is often nonexistent, or minimal. As librarians work to make grant writing a priority at their institutions, they must be mindful of the importance of building relationships with the university administration, various colleges and departments within the university, individual faculty members, staff, students, and members of the surrounding community. In an era of falling enrollment, budget cuts and pressure from administration to “prove value,” grant writing can also be a great marketing/promotional tool. Furthermore, programming grants can aid in student recruitment and retention, by bringing in not only the university community, but the general community served by the university as well, which can provide a university with greater exposure. There is also the opportunity to collaborate with businesses in the community.

In this article, we will use the grant writing and programming experiences of the Troy University Libraries to demonstrate that small grants can be a worthy undertaking for academic libraries both large and small. To begin, it is important for the reader to develop an understanding of Troy University’s Libraries prior to delving into our grant activities. Troy University Libraries are located on three campuses in three cities in Alabama: Troy, Dothan, and Montgomery. All three of these cities’ campuses are approximately 50 miles apart, which makes collaboration on projects relatively easy. Prior to the 2005 academic year, all of Troy’s campuses were independently accredited. For the three libraries, this meant that although there was a Dean of Libraries at our Troy, AL campus, that office only provided general guidance as to what the other campus libraries should be doing. All libraries also shared an OPAC, but otherwise had remarkably little interaction.

After 2005 and the unification of all of Troy’s campuses under the moniker of One Great University (OGU), various colleges at Troy’s extension campuses had to cope with a loss of independence. This phenomenon did not occur within the Troy Libraries. The dean at the time, Dr. Henry Stewart, allowed both of his directors to have a great deal of autonomy, and encouraged them to work together, as well as with the librarians on the Troy, AL campus. This attitude of openness and collegiality was essential to the

collaboration of the librarians on grants and related programming.

Grant Writing - Starting Small

Troy University Libraries has actively pursued a variety of small grants since 2008, with 48 of them being funded. These grants centered on outreach programming and book purchases. Although it would be nice to believe that what has been a remarkable success for the Libraries started with a concrete vision and a plan upon which to build, the contrary is the case. One small success built upon another small success, and through a process of incrementalism, a robust group of grant writers was developed. Ultimately, a camaraderie developed among many of the librarians at our three facilities because of these activities, which allowed for a level of collegiality to develop that had previously not existed.

All of these activities began quite inauspiciously when the Dothan campus’ library director applied for a small materials grant from the Institute of Museums and Library Services, as well as a second grant to host an on-campus French film festival through a program named the Tournees Film Festival, which is offered through the French American Cultural Exchange (FACE). Both applications were successful, and the attention received was surprising. Upper level members of the University administration were pleased that a librarian was pursuing grants, which was something new for them, and the publicity surrounding the film series was positive for the Dothan library. The following year, 2009, three more grants were successfully written, two for collection development, and one for programming.

The spread of grant-related activities to Troy’s other campuses began in 2010. Dothan’s director was aided by the fact that he had served his initial year at the university on the Troy campus. He was also on several university-wide committees. Both of these facts gave him the connections he needed to build partnerships and collaborations that would allow him to bring grant-funded programming to the other campuses. If there was a game changer for the Dothan campus library regarding small programming grants, it was also in 2010. FACE again funded the Tournees French Film Festival, which was kicked off with a wine and cheese reception (a radical idea in rural south Alabama) that 38 people attended.

The real jolt that caused many people to take notice of how significant a small grant could be to the library was \$1,797 in funding received from the Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF) to host a Holocaust survivor named Ann Rosenheck. Mrs. Rosenheck was a survivor of three separate concentration camps, and people had a much stronger desire to hear her story than anyone at the library ever anticipated. This grant also marked the first time that the library had collaborated to host events at Troy's other two libraries as well as a public elementary school and a private high school. At five venues, approximately 1,200 attendees were able to witness Mrs. Rosenheck tell her story. In Dothan, the Sony Hall Theatre holds 212 guests. It was necessary to quickly set up an overflow room with streaming capacity. A total of 242 people attended the Dothan event. Area press coverage was good as well, with newspaper and television news stories appearing.

A second event from 2010 is also worth noting. That year the AHF also funded the Libraries to host an expert on Black Cowboys—Mike Searles—on the Dothan and Troy campuses. The crowd in Dothan totaled 42, which is a solid number for a public lecture. However, when making the arrangements several months in advance, no one realized that the lecture was taking place on Super Bowl Sunday. The positive attendance numbers were a reflection of the fact that people were taking notice of events going on at the Dothan campus library, and that we could rely on the area to supply us a solid number of guests for events, even when there was competition from competing sources. The Associated Press picked up the Troy University Marketing department's press release, which provided national exposure for the speaker and University. These events also marked the first time many of the senior administrators at the University had ever thought of the library as an entity that could educate and enrich the lives of the students and surrounding community, as opposed to simply being a warehouse for books. Both events served as remarkably good and free publicity for the University, which certainly did not go unnoticed either.

The next two years continued as before, with several grants being received in Dothan. When possible, activities were extended to the other campuses. In 2013, a lesson about the dangers of success was learned. Out of 10 grants applied for by the director, Chris Shaffer, in Dothan, 9 were received. Whenever possible he had always encouraged other librarians to collaborate with him, but for this many grants to be successfully implemented, collaboration was essential. Not only did librarians from the other campuses quickly agree to help host events on their campuses, but faculty, particularly those from the colleges of Arts and Sciences and Education offered their time and expertise. It was in this spirit that not only a strong cadre of programming librarians was created, but also a bridge of collaboration was formed between the librarians and several of the teaching faculty at the University.

Motivating Librarians (at Troy) to Write Grants

Librarians at Troy were motivated to begin writing small grants through a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic

motivation. Tenure and promotion guidelines were modified. Suddenly, a successful grant could be counted as progress toward tenure and/or promotion for the librarian involved. However, this was not the primary reason librarians began writing grants, and the reasons the grant-writing program developed so strongly were much more intrinsic in nature. Librarians noticed the positive praise senior administrators gave the Dothan campus library for initiating grant-driven programming and collection development activities. They also felt a personal reward, or sense of satisfaction when they received a grant. In short, it feels good to win something. Finally, grant writing and the inter-departmental collaborative opportunities it led to, allowed the librarians to feel as though they were viewed as true colleagues by teaching faculty.

The spread of the pursuit of grants by librarians on other Troy campuses was facilitated by a combination of very mild mentorship and extreme practicality. Troy's three campuses with libraries—Montgomery, Troy, and Dothan—are 50 miles apart in a straight line on a north/south highway. To conduct programming successfully on all three campuses it was necessary to have librarians help at each site. Initially, Dothan's director wrote the grants, and added someone from each of the campuses to the team, whose only job was to help with implementation at their site. Later, as librarians became interested in projects of their own, he would share project narratives from previous initiatives, and give advice and assistance as needed. The entire process can be viewed as incremental in nature. The ultimate result was that Troy's librarians went from having one successful grant writer in 2010, to ten in 2017. These grant writers could be found at all three of our libraries in Alabama.

Going after Larger Grants

After gaining experience receiving small grants of \$1,000 to \$4,500, librarians are now pursuing and receiving somewhat larger grants. These have included a Common Heritage grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by the director of the Wiregrass Archives (WA), Dr. Marty Olliff. The grant, for \$12,000 allowed WA personnel to teach members of the public how to digitally preserve their family photo albums and histories. That same year, Ms. Alyssa Martin received a National Endowment for the Arts Big Read grant of \$16,000. It is hard to envision the Troy University Libraries applying for significantly larger grants, due to the lack of a Library Science program, and a relatively small faculty and staff.

Literature Review

During the last decade of the twentieth century, academic libraries were thrust into the fundraising arena as never before. Faced with the continuing need to provide traditional print resources, while at the same time navigating emerging markets for electronic resources and the hardware needed to maintain them, often with shrinking

or reduced budgets, more attention was devoted to procuring funds from a variety of external sources. As Susan Nutter summarized in her opening remarks as president-elect of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) at the 120th membership meeting, "Fund raising can no longer be an afterthought or a tangential activity labeled as a non-library function. Raising funds will be imperative to the growth and maintenance of first-rate libraries. In the coming decades fund raising will literally make the difference between mediocrity and excellence for many of our libraries," (Hazard, 2003).

As libraries and other public institutions navigated the economic downturn of the first decade of the twenty-first century, reliance on grant funding and foundation style gifts increased dramatically. As Clark points out, "During periods of budget cuts and consolidation, librarians must consider all means of outreach and fundraising. Despite reductions in collection funds, user expectations for new materials remain high," (Clark, 2011). The importance of grant funding for libraries is increasingly being codified in the official records of our institutions. A recent study reviewed 63 research libraries' strategic plans and found that, "external fundraising, including grants, was included in 22 (34.9%) plans," (Saunders, 2015).

Although greater attention is currently devoted to studying the role of, and process for, securing grant funding in the academic library sphere, "it is still sparse in comparison to most other areas of library management," (Casey, 2010). This is especially true in the arena of small grants addressing patron needs. While external funding has allowed libraries of all shapes and sizes to fill existing gaps in legacy collections and traditional services provided, it has also allowed for innovative ideas to flourish that address evolving patron needs. Once viewed as mere consumers of information, library patrons now require tools and services that emphasize their role as creators of new information in formats that extend beyond traditional work products: books, articles, research papers, etc. (Goodman, 2014).

Issues causing smaller academic libraries to write grants are seen on a grander scale at larger universities. Regardless of the needs that are served by external funding opportunities, there arguably exists an understandable bias at larger research institutions in favor of procuring significant endowments or grants. This is reflected in the modern research library landscape by addressing needs on campus associated with emerging initiatives that require large investments, such as big data initiatives, institutional repositories, and media production labs (Arlitsch, 2013). As such, liaison librarians are now encouraged, as part of the strategic planning process, to focus on developing partnerships with faculty to support efforts to secure major external research funding, such as that provided by the National Science Foundation or the National Endowment for the Humanities. Given that grant funding requires some form of administrative costs, larger grants are viewed as more desirable by University and Library administrators, as there is a more desirable payoff to administrative cost ratio, when compared to grants of a

The Southeastern Librarian, Vol. 65, no. 2, Summer 2017

smaller size. Additionally, major granting organizations "expect researchers to demonstrate the highest possible return on investment for their grant dollars," and librarians, because of their skills and expertise, are increasingly called upon as partners in the grant writing process for larger opportunities (Federer, 2013).

This article explores using small grants as a means to satisfy libraries' material and service needs, as well as accomplish important public relations goals. There are several potential benefits related to procuring smaller grants in the academic library world that are addressed in the literature. Alexander reminds us that although "an institution may be fortunate enough to receive a major gift... one should remember that fundraising is a long and patient process," (Alexander, 1998). This is true of grants as well as gifts. Relationships built with granting agencies in successfully implementing a small grant, can lead to positive consideration for larger grants later. The process of writing smaller grants is largely viewed as a stepping-stone to procuring larger ones. As Keast advises, "Grants come in all sizes, from a \$500 gift from a private foundation in a local community to the multimillion-dollar government grant. For a local music program, the million-dollar grants are not very practical. Start small and grow your grant-writing capabilities." (Keast, 2011).

With that in mind, many institutions have opted to "self-fund," or provide librarians with smaller amounts of seed money, and the possibility to hone their grant writing skills, in the form of "innovation grants." The existence and development of this framework shows that, while larger opportunities are desirable, smaller goals do in fact serve a larger purpose. Writing about the University of Houston's Strategic Directions Microgrant Program, begun in 2006, Getz observes, "because the program favors innovation, it has provided opportunities for librarians and staff to collaborate across departments and bring together expertise from several functional areas. SDMP projects thus enabled the strengthening of professional relationships, to the benefit of future work within the Libraries," (Getz, 2014). Librarians have also benefited professionally in that the grants have encouraged the pursuit of scholarship opportunities as well.

Offering internal micro-grants as an innovation strategy represents another trend present in the literature related to library deans cultivating entrepreneurship amongst their staff. "With changing environments and cultures in higher education, academic library fundraising and development programs have become integral in advancing the mission and enhancing library services during tight budgetary times. Now, it is almost the norm that library deans are required to have fundraising skills and abilities," (Huang, 2006). By offering librarians smaller opportunities to try new strategies and resources, a library director has the potential to reap public relations benefits of those initiatives that succeed, as well as generate fundraising help and expertise among members of the organization heretofore not involved in fundraising efforts.

In a 2012 study of ARL directors encouraging entrepreneurial opportunities among librarians, Carpenter found “participants said that being entrepreneurial was helping their libraries to address financial difficulties and to attract new resources. Additionally, taking an entrepreneurial approach to planning enabled some directors to redirect existing resources toward new, emerging needs and to frame new roles for libraries or new arenas for those roles,” (Carpenter, 2012).

“Libraries have long collected input and output data, but increasingly library managers believe that budget allocators are demanding evidence of library service outcomes, their economic value for the individuals who use them and the society that support them and perhaps more importantly, the resulting impact on the community or organization in which the service is located,” (Calvert, 2015). Given that library directors are increasingly expected to demonstrate the library’s value to campus stakeholders, it is logical that plans include varying strategies to win the public relations wars on campus, while increasing patron access to needed services and materials. Smaller grant opportunities allow for greater flexibility from a trial and error standpoint.

Examples of innovative initiatives funded by smaller grants include North Carolina State University’s (NCSU) use of The EZ Innovation Grant from the State Library of North Carolina to fund efforts to develop a means of capturing and saving “the increasingly critical but ephemeral social media conversations that now regularly document our lives and times,” (NCSU Libraries, 2014). The resulting Social Media Archives toolkit was designed to “have a meaningful impact on archival researchers by promoting the inclusion in the historical record of a larger and more diverse set of perspectives found through social media platforms,” (North Carolina State University Libraries, 2014). NCSU has also applied the small grant philosophy to funding alternative textbook options for campus faculty. “Ranging between \$500 and \$2,000, the competitive AltTextbook grants will be awarded to help faculty pursue innovative uses of technology and information resources that can replace pricey traditional textbooks.” (NCSU Libraries, 2014).

Conclusion

What We Have Learned from Grant Writing

As a result of grant writing, which led to book purchases, lectures, exhibits, and book discussions, administrators came to view the libraries on their campuses as “relevant again,” a description that was used by two different senior level administrators at the University. It is worth noting though, that no library will get rich by writing small grants as the ones discussed in this article. If anything, the various programs we have hosted cost more than the grants themselves. However, there is an undoubted positive return on investment. Overall, we have increased the visibility of our library to our stakeholders: university administrators, faculty, staff and students at Troy University, as well as the general public in our communities. We have gained recognition for our grant-writing activities. Every year, Sponsored Programs at Troy University honors *The Southeastern Librarian*, Vol. 65, no. 2, Summer 2017

faculty who have written grants. The Chancellor and other administrative officials attend this event. Having several librarians being recognized for their grant writing achievements at this function does much to elevate them in the eyes of other faculty at the University. Grant activities are also prominently featured in the annual Chancellor’s Briefing as being a way in which the library influences recruitment and retention. Finally, in 2015, Dr. Chris Shaffer received the I Love My Librarian Award for his programming activities, which added national prominence to the libraries’ grant and programming initiatives.

One of the goals of emphasizing grant-funded programming at the University Libraries was to increase student usage of our three libraries, which unfortunately did not happen at our Montgomery, AL and Dothan, AL sites. Usage did increase significantly at the Troy, AL campus. It is difficult to determine the extent to which programming played a role though, because as these events were taking place, a major upgrade of the facility was underway, and a variety of increased services were being added to that library.

Through programming, the libraries were able to increase their visibility, and the University’s visibility to the communities they served. This can be viewed as potentially positive in terms of being a recruitment tool. It can definitely be viewed as a positive community relations tool.

Faculty librarians, who in some cases had been demoralized because of both their roles (or lack thereof) at the University, and the way in which they were often perceived by teaching faculty, indicated feelings of accomplishment and pride at their achievements with grant writing and programming. In particular, they were pleased with the idea that they were making a positive difference in the communities they served. They also liked the positive attention they received from administrators and the teaching faculty for the grant and programming work they were doing.

Another benefit the libraries gained from these various inter-campus collaborations was increased communication among librarians while working toward a common goal. Previously, librarians had been “siloeed” on their respective campuses. Working with each other, it was possible for all involved to learn about each of the three libraries, and opened the door for librarians becoming comfortable with the concept of being exportable, and occasionally working at a different campus library for short periods.

Other academic libraries will find it possible to replicate the initiatives implemented at the Troy University Libraries. The main requirements are a committed administration, a group of librarians committed to working collaboratively, and adequate time and rewards (such as credit toward tenure and/or promotion), to engage in such projects.

References

- Alexander, J. O. (1998). Fundraising for the evolving academic library: The strategic small shop advantage. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 24(2), 131.
- Arlitsch, K. (2013). Committing to research: Librarians and grantsmanship. *Journal of Library Administration*, 53(5-6), 369-379. doi:10.1080/01930826.2013.876828
- Calvert, P., & Goulding, A. (2015). Narratives and stories that capture the library's worth: A qualitative approach to measuring value and impact in New Zealand's libraries. *Performance Measurement and Metrics*, 16(3), 276-288. doi:10.1108/PMM-05-2015-0016
- Carpenter, M. T. H. (2012). Cheerleader, opportunity seeker, and master strategist: ARL directors as entrepreneurial leaders. *College & Research Libraries*, 73(1), 11-32.
- Casey, A. M., & Lorenzen, M. (2010). Untapped potential: Seeking library donors among alumni of distance learning programs. *Journal of Library Administration*, 50(5), 515-529. doi:10.1080/01930826.2010.488597
- Clark, J. (2011). Creative fundraising through campus collaborations. *Journal of Library Innovation*, 2(2), 62-67.
- Federer, L. (2013). The librarian as research informationist: A case study. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 101(4), 298-302. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.101.4.011
- Getz, K., Bennett, M. H., & Linden, N. (2014). Encouraging entrepreneurship with internal small grants: The strategic directions microgrant program at the University of Houston libraries. *Journal of Library Innovation*, 5(1), 55-66.
- Goodman, A. L. (2014). Chapter 1: The library context for digital media labs. *Library Technology Reports*, 50(6), 5-15.
- Hazard, B. L. (2003). Online fundraising at ARL libraries. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 29(1), 8.
- Huang, S. T. (2006). Where there's a will, there's a way: Fundraising for the academic library. *Bottom Line*, 19(3), 146-151. doi:10.1108/08880450610682563
- Keast, D. A. (2011). I Don't Need a Million-Dollar Grant—\$5,000 Will Do!. *Music Educators Journal*, (1), 77.
- NCSU libraries developing toolkit to make it easier to collect and preserve social media. (2014). *Southeastern Librarian*, 62(3), 20.
- North Carolina State University Libraries. (2014). Social Media Archives Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/social-media-archives-toolkit>
- Saunders, L. (2015). Academic libraries' strategic plans: Top trends and under-recognized areas. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, (3), 285. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2015.03.011