

ment strategies and tools that will best assure system access and performance to support faculty, students and researchers. The academic library has

a vested interest in managing its campus computing center effectively. ■■

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# Building a strategy for academic library exhibits

By Lucy S. Caswell

*Curator, Library for Communication and Graphic Arts  
Ohio State University*

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## *Education as a primary goal for library exhibition programs.*

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**D**espite the fact that exhibitions are labor intensive and thus make heavy demands on the most expensive resource, most academic libraries have some type of exhibit facility, ranging from bulletin boards used to display the jackets of new books to custom-designed cases for rare books. While few would dispute the effectiveness of bulletin boards in boosting circulation, such efforts are not under consideration here. The term exhibition as used in this article refers to displays of a significant number of items organized in such a way as to convey information to the viewer. The purposes of academic library exhibitions will be briefly reviewed prior to suggesting uses of exhibitions as library instruction tools and examining the contribution of such exhibition programs to the academic community.

The traditional reasons for exhibits in college and university libraries are often taken for granted. Sandra Powers suggests that the major goals of an exhibition program are education, increased use and public relations.<sup>1</sup> Within the academic library

certainly education should be the primary aim. Exhibits may be related directly to classroom projects (a daguerreotype exhibit for the history of photography class) or to continuing education programs (medieval manuscripts displayed for a conference on popular religious culture in the Middle Ages). Instructional goals may also be more general (to illustrate the development of film advertising from 1910 to 1930), but exhibit planners should always be able to relate their show to the academic enterprise.

As mentioned previously, increasing circulation by calling attention to exhibited materials has long been accepted as an appropriate rationale for exhibition. Within an ongoing exhibit program in a college or university library, it is important to remember that essentially the entire undergraduate population changes over a four year period. Because of this, repeat exhibitions may be appropriate, especially displays of special materials which may not come to the attention of potential users in other ways. Undergraduates are sometimes hesitant to enter what appears to be an inner sanctum called "special collections" or "rare books room." If selected materials from these areas are exhibited in

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<sup>1</sup>Sandra Powers, "Why Exhibit? The Risks Versus the Benefits," *American Archivist* 41 (July 1978):302.



*Festival of Cartoon Art exhibit at Ohio State's Main Library, 1983.*

Cr: Lloyd Lemmerman

a generally accessible locale, some undergraduates may be curious enough to seek additional information in the repository.

The use of exhibitions mainly for public relations should be approached cautiously. Kohn and Tepper devote a chapter of *You Can Do It* to displays, exhibits and bulletin boards. The six uses of exhibits suggested by the authors range from telling the "library's story for the purpose of creating understanding and good will" to relating to "things the people in the community are doing."<sup>2</sup> While these may be valid goals, they should not overshadow the general didactic mission of the exhibit in the academic library setting. Mounting a special show of items from the college or university archives for homecoming might be appropriate and would provide an opportunity to emphasize the availability of such materials to potential users.

A fourth possible aim for an exhibition program might be collection development. A collector owning items which both relate to the instructional program of the institution and fall within the acquisition policy of the library may be invited to exhibit selected items. The exhibit librarian can use this opportunity to build the donor's confidence in the institution and to demonstrate how his or her collection would enrich the library's holdings. Such an exhibit indicates interest in the collection and makes its existence known within the campus community, a factor which can further enhance

the probability of the library's eventually acquiring the materials in question.

Assuming that education is the primary goal of the academic library exhibit, how can such programs be adapted to library instruction? Several methods are possible:

- Exhibits may be used as consciousness-raising devices: A conservation/preservation program might be highlighted by an exhibit of books in various states of distress due to misuse.

- Exhibits may be used to highlight new or unusual holdings: Botanical prints purchased with funds from a library friends group might be exhibited to announce their arrival on campus.

- Exhibits may be designed to stimulate a new approach to materials: the bindings and illustrations in a fiction collection might be emphasized rather than the texts of the novels.

- Exhibits may provide an overview of a complex process in a subject-specific area and suggest sources for additional information. Four-color printing might be shown through paste-ups and color separations augmented by books and periodicals from the library's holdings.

These methods are adaptable to exhibitions related to almost any academic discipline. In order to take advantage of publicity opportunities, exhibitions should be scheduled well in advance of their installation. Planning the entire academic year's exhibit schedule will provide an overview of activities and can ensure a variety of shows. Care should be taken that the type of exhibit planned is suitable for the potential audience. Serbian manuscripts

<sup>2</sup>Rita Kohn and Krysta Tepper, *You Can Do It* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1981), p.71.



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might be more appropriately shown in a special collections area than the lobby of an undergraduate library.

Most library exhibit programs would benefit from broader participation by library faculty and staff in their planning and execution. Although special skills are involved in exhibit preparation, an experienced installer or a committee appointed to oversee exhibitions could assist with technical questions. Library exhibits offer a fine opportunity to bring patrons and information together under enjoyable circumstances.

While exhibitions are a secondary function of academic libraries, they may make a substantial contribution to the academic community. An exhibit catalog published in-house can correlate and present information which is otherwise unavailable. This is especially true for collections of local and regional materials. Because libraries generally approach exhibitions from a contextual perspective, skillfully written captions and commentaries

may encourage viewers to relate materials in new ways. Occasionally campus libraries may provide alternative exhibition space for shows deemed inappropriate for the art gallery or museum. And on occasion library exhibit planners should take their shows "on the road" to the student union or administration building. The services offered by academic libraries and the astonishing variety of materials they house deserve wider recognition.

The conception of an exhibit idea, the research needed to choose items to be included and the organization of these materials into a meaningful presentation are a challenge for the exhibit planner. At its best, the academic library exhibit is a scholarly effort subject to review by a large audience. Although few libraries can mount exhibits on the scale of the New York Public Library's recent show, "Censorship: 500 Years of Conflict," such efforts should serve to inspire the library community to use exhibitions more purposefully. ■■

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## ACRL and higher education

By JoAn S. Segal and Sharon Rogers

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*The ACRL executive director and president visit the higher education community in Washington, D.C.*

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Since the ALA Midwinter Meeting was held in Washington, D.C., where many higher education associations have their headquarters, Sharon Rogers and JoAn Segal decided the visit might afford an opportunity to meet with leaders in those associations to establish some links between the professional association for academic librarians and the associations dealing with the academy in its other aspects. On January 11 we visited the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the Association of American Colleges (AAC), the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the American Council

on Education (ACE).

At AAHE, we had an excellent visit. The Association, like ACRL, is one of individual members. Most of the members are administrators in institutions of higher education. An important activity of this association is the National Conference on Higher Education (NCHE), which will be held this year in Chicago. AAHE seeks a broad base of membership, and offers through its National Conference the opportunity for networks of educators to meet together and to establish relationships within their own groups and between the groups. We