Promoting library services to campus administrative offices

A new approach and a new tool

by Jian Wang

A search of "Library Literature"[1] indicates that much has been written about university library services provided to students and faculty. However, as of this writing, no literature addresses issues on promoting university library services to the subset of nonacademic offices on campus, suggesting that campus administrative offices are often neglected and underserved by the library.

This article describes a pilot project, undertaken at the University of Michigan at Dearborn's (UMD) Mardigian Library, to extend information services and resources to this neglected user group. It demonstrates the implications of the changing nature of library services for academic librarians who are challenged to think and act like entrepreneurs in meeting the increased and changing needs of all user groups on campus.

Background

UMD is a medium-sized urban university serving a student population of approximately 8,000. The University Library has more than 30 full-time staff members including 12 librarians. Public services librarians work with teaching faculty to support teaching, learning, and research activities at the university, while technical services librarians are almost invisible because of the nature of their work.

In 1998, Timothy F. Richards, library director at the Mardigian Library, initiated a pilot project to explore potential opportunities for marketing and promoting library services and resources to a wider campus community. The goals of the pilot project were 1) to establish relationships with campus groups beyond the teaching faculty, 2) to enhance library services to campus administrative offices, and 3) to increase the visibility of technical services librarians on campus.

I was assigned to work on this project with the help of a library administrative assistant. Our first target group chosen was the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at UMD. OIR has five full-time staff members. Their primary responsibility is to conduct studies on such topics as student retention, enrollment, graduation rates, and academic programs to facilitate institutional planning, and to support decision-making affecting the university.

Because OIR staff rely heavily on data, statistics, and research information to perform their work, there is always a need for information. The librarians thought that a project such as this would be helpful to OIR staff. Furthermore, the head of OIR was very supportive, too, in agreeing to a trial of this pilot project.

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Needs assessments

To provide the best service, it is essential to understand the information needs of a given target group. I decided to start with needs assessment as the first step of the project to gain a better understanding of the information needs of the OIR staff. I thought that using an information needs survey would be a helpful tool in identifying the information requirements, expectations, and priorities of the OIR.

I consulted the library literature first, in the hopes of finding an appropriate survey instrument. However, not being able to find one suitable to the purpose of the project, I designed my own questionnaire (see table 1), which was to be used for soliciting information. Before meeting with the OIR staff, I sent the questionnaire to them with the hope that it would help them generate ideas about their information needs. Then I scheduled a follow-up meeting with the OIR staff to discuss their needs.

Exchange of ideas

After the OIR staff had a chance to review the survey questionnaire and discuss the issues among themselves, the library administrative assistant and I interviewed them at their office. The interview lasted less than one hour with very good results. We explained our purpose for carrying out this pilot project. Then the OIR staff members described what they did at work, what their projects and goals were, and what information resources would be beneficial to them.

Because of the openness and enthusiasm of the OIR staff and our willingness to listen to their needs and wants, both parties gained each other's trust. As a result, the relationship between these two units on campus was strengthened.

Survey results

Data on information needs from the interview and survey were collected and compiled (see table 2). It is interesting to note the diverse information needs of this target group and their preferences for receiving the information. The survey results indicated that Internet resources are the most important to them, and electronic delivery is the preferred method of access.

Product design

Developing an information product aligned with the strategic goals of the OIR became much easier once some of the specific needs of the target group were understood. I began with exhaustive searches of the Internet, various library catalogs, research databases, indexes, and full-text articles.

To facilitate Internet searching, I compiled a listing of relevant subject terms first (see table 3), and then conducted searches using various search engines including Yahoo, AltaVista, Lycos, Northern Light, and Metacrawler. I chose these search engines because they are typical and have different searching strategies.

Scott Nicholson has classified Web search tools into five categories: directory-based search tool, full-text search tool, extracting search tool, subject-specific search tool, and meta-search tool.[2] The search engines that I used seem to encompass all types of search tools categorized by Nicholson.

Table 2. Survey Results for OIR Information Needs

- Documents on the Internet
- Databases on higher education
- Government information on higher education
- Information on the Michigan Department of Education
- Data on assessment, retention, enrollment, and graduation rates
- Information on institutional planning, management, and students' success
- Access to organizations affiliated with higher education
- Information on foundations
- Journal articles
- Other Web sites on institutional research
- Colleges' and universities' Web sites in Michigan
- Demographic information
- Economic information
- Census databases
- Updated information on higher education, i.e., legislation
- Conference papers
- Associations, listservs, and newsgroups

After the searching was completed, I then evaluated these resources, selected them, and finally organized them into a customized information package. Because the OIR chose the Web as their desired mode of access to these resources, the finished product was mounted on the University Library's Electronic Reserves (Eres) server on the Web. Eres allows digital material to be password-protected to copyright restrictions.

The resources listed on the project Web site can be accessed remotely via a password. The Web pages were designed to be user-friendly. As an example, online order forms were provided on the screen for easy and quick requests of needed items. The OIR staff were also encouraged to seek our ongoing support via e-mail, with e-mail links on the Web pages.[3]

Follow-up
Good customer service requires ongoing involvement. After the product was developed

and mounted on the Web, we met with OIR staff to demonstrate the Web sites. I also used this time for group training. In a departure from the usual practice of in-library information delivery, we chose to deliver this information package in person to the OIR office. The changing nature of library services requires such changes in behavior from librarians.

"The librarian must fill a dual role as salesperson of library services and as a provider of or part of service."[4] This new "sales" concept added value and increased customer satisfaction. The library's hands-on demonstration of the information product/package for OIR on the Web was important to ensure customer satisfaction and to develop the OIR staff's confidence in using the library's product. OIR was also asked to give the library staff feedback after a period of use so that the library could improve its product and services in the future.

Discussion
With limited time for this project to extend library services and limited funding in the library, this pilot project had to be added to the regular workload of the library staff. As such, it took about three months for the project to be completed. The feedback from the OIR staff was positive and encouraging. They liked the idea of having appropriate information available on their desktop. Also

Table 3. Relevant Subject Headings Used

- Institutional planning
- Institutional research
- Institutional management
- Institutional studies
- Institutional assessment
- Institutional evaluation
- Institutional effectiveness
- Institutional statistics
- Institutional research association
- Enrollment management
- College student retention
- Collection student success
- Collection student graduation rate
- Higher education
- Census database
- Demographics

they were made aware of valuable resources available to them, such as research databases and full-text electronic journals to which the library subscribes. After successful completion of first pilot project with OIR, other offices showed interest in this customer-tailored service, too. Obviously, this service resulted in very good public relations for the Mardigian Library.

With the successes, challenges also arose. Since information resources are increasing and changing all the time without notice, maintaining the Web sites and keeping the resources updated became a challenging task. I had to check links periodically to ensure the validity of the resources, and I looked for new resources regularly to add to the existing resources to ensure their current status. The degree of ongoing work was underestimated.

It is important to remember that designing a product is only part of the process, and that maintaining the quality of the product and services is an ongoing task that requires considerable time and effort. There are many more electronic resources available on the subject since the first pilot project was conducted. I also recommend a follow-up meeting every six months with the target group for feedback and improvement. In retrospect, the questionnaire survey could have been designed to assess the target group's needs in greater detail.

Conclusion

This pilot project demonstrated the success of a customer-driven approach in marketing and promoting library and information services to a neglected user group on university campus. It helped the library staff gain a better perception of how a previously underserved group is an integral part of the campus. The library staff got experience, input, and feedback on how best to expand library services to a less visible non-academic group (from the library services point of view) on campus. Using the Internet as a tool to promote library services and resources proved to be favorable to users. Reflecting on the specific pilot project's results provides a basis for improved support and realistic expectations.

Useful search engines

- *AltaVista* www.altavista.com
- *Ask Jeeves* www.ask.com/
- *Direct Hit* www.directhit.com/
- *Intelliseek* www.intelliseek.com
- *Excite* www.excite.com
- *ExpertCentral* www.expertcentral.com/
- *FAST Search* www.alltheweb.com
- *GoTo* www.goto.com
- *Factiva* www.factiva.com/
- *Fast Search* www.macsoldiers.com/fastsearch/
- *Go Network* www.go.com/
- *Google* www.google.com/
- *HotBot* www.hotbot.com
- *HotLinks Guide* www.guide.hotlinks.com/guide/
- *Inktomi* www.inktomi.com/products/portal/search/
- *iWon* www.iwon.com
- *Lexis-Nexis Freestyle* www.lexis-nexis.com/
- *LookSmart* www.looksmart.com

- *Lycos* www.lycos.com
- *MaxBot.com* www.maxbot.com/
- *Metacrawler* www.metacrawler.com/
- *MSN Search* http://search.msn.com/
- *Netscape Search* http://search.netscape.com
- *Northern Light* www.northernlight.com
- *Oingo* www.oingo.com/
- *Simpli.com* www.simpli.com
- *Open Directory* www.dmoz.org/
- *Raging Search* www.raging.com/
- *RealNames* www.realnames.com/
- *WebCrawler* www.webcrawler.com
- *Yahoo* www.yahoo.com

Note: Readers interested in the techniques of Internet searching are recommended to see Randolph Hock, "Web search engines: (more) features & commands," *Online* (May/June, 2000): 17. For more information about search engines see: http://www.searchenginewatch.com.

As a result of UMD's Mardigian Library's Project, our target group, OIR, was better educated about the availability and reliability of library information services, and gained easier access to the information they needed. Library outreach projects such as this enhance library services to all potential user groups, promote cooperative relationships between campus communities, and ultimately benefit the whole university.

Notes

1. *Library Literature* (Bornx: H.W. Wilson, 1984–)

2. Scott Nicholson, "A proposal for categorization and nomenclature for Web search tools," *Journal of Internet Cataloging* 2, 3/4 (2000): 9.

3. Those interested in Web site design should see Kristen L. Garlock and Sherry Piontech, *Designing Web interfaces to library services and resources* (Chicago: American Library Association 1999).

4. Stephen Markel, *Marketing the library* (1996). Available at http://www-personal.si. umich.edu/~smarkel/papers/misc/marketing_libraries.html. ■

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with students at this educational level than they are with undergraduates. In addition, we have time to accustom them to such methods over the course of the semester. Initial resistance usually crumbles as students understand the effectiveness of these methods and as we set the tone for the class such that students feel more comfortable with their classmates.

Assignments

Assignments need to be a mix of the theoretical and the practical, readings, and activities or exercises. Graduate students can be given fairly heavy reading loads, and as long as they are being held accountable in some way, they will come to class prepared. They often become very engaged with the readings, and adding one or two controversial sources to the syllabus can lead to lively discussions. As with any graduate program of study, they need to understand the theory behind the practice and the concepts that currently guide the profession. They also need assignments that will prepare them for what they will be asked to do on the job; assignments like preparing a lesson plan for an instruction session or writing an Internet use policy.

Benefits to our students

While we believe that teaching part-time provides us with immense professional benefits, we think it also benefits our students. Brundin reported on a study of Canadian library school faculty conducted in 1979. "For many educators practical experience was a strong factor in establishing their credibility with their students as well as colleagues in the field."[1]

Brundin also said, "Librarianship is a people-oriented profession; we are concerned with users and with service to the users. We teach our students concepts and techniques, but do we effectively prepare them to use these concepts and techniques in the working library world with real library patrons."[2]

Students in LIS programs cannot do without the theory that they learn from their full-time instructors. But we are able to provide, in one or two of their courses, the perspective of what goes on in an actual library, with the problems and challenges and successes that we encounter daily. We have encouraged our students to keep in touch with us, and when they do, we have been delighted to hear, "Your class prepared me well."

Contact your library school

Teaching these courses has furthered our professional development, provided continuing education, and given us the opportunity to educate future librarians. We have only benefited from the experience, and so we encourage librarians to avail themselves of this chance. If you work at an institution with a graduate LIS school or have such a school in your area, contact the dean to inquire about becoming an adjunct faculty member. The opportunity to teach future members of our profession provides a win-win situation for both the students and for us, and is not to be missed!

Notes

1. Robert E. Brundin, "Field experience and the library educator," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 31 (1991): 366.
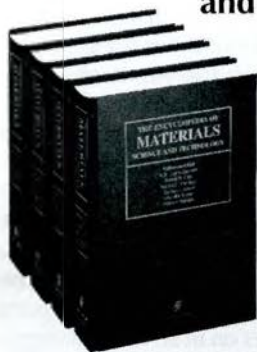
2. Ibid., p. 367. ■