

Alice Wasielewski

The huge hubbub

Freshman orientation fun at the library

On August 25, 2008, within the hallowed halls of Kentucky's largest research library, the atmosphere was not as "academic" as one might think. From outside, gazing up at the imposing edifice of the University of Kentucky's William T. Young library, which takes up nearly an entire city block in Lexington, Kentucky, you might have faintly heard the echoes of Guitar Hero, Wii bowling, or other video games. If you peeked inside, you would have found that students at the second annual "Hubbub" were enjoying a wide variety of free activities designed to welcome new freshmen during orientation week, by showing them the lighter side of the library.

More than 700 students enjoyed pizza, soft drinks, and cupcakes commemorating the tenth anniversary of Young Library in its new Information Commons, known as "The Hub @ WT's" or just "The Hub." Their heads were sometimes festooned with large, elaborate, colorful balloon hats from a balloon artist, busily taking requests. The faces of many students were brightened by donated makeovers by workers from a local Sephora beauty shop, while others had their faces exaggerated in drawn caricatures they could take home. A professional instructor conducted peppy Zumba lessons for those interested in improving their health through Latin dance. Students who grew tired after all the activity sat on the floor playing board games, eating snacks donated by the campus vending service. Library volunteers were kept busy. They set up a photo booth with props and a green screen to take photos that were projected around the room, as well as posted on Flickr. They read tarot cards and

palms to apprise students of their fortunes. They drew names for prizes donated by local businesses, as well as kept the lines moving for all the activities.

At the end of the day, the library was quiet once again. However, the familiarity with the Information Commons and the library gained from the Hubbub, they were soon back again, enjoying the space they know is theirs: The Hub.

Goals and process

When we began planning our first freshmen event as part of university welcome week in 2007, we were starting from scratch. Our new Information Commons had been converted from mainly empty space in the basement in the early spring, and it was only starting to become known around campus. We wanted to make sure we got the word out to all students about the new space in the library where food and noise were welcome and where there was lots of great study space with flexible furniture conducive to group projects.

We wanted to make sure that students physically entered the space to see it and experienced some good times that would make them want to return. To begin, we formed a committee of interested library faculty and staff to brainstorm ideas and get the groundwork done. We organized early enough that we had the whole summer to complete our planning.

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Challenges

In 2007, we were a little afraid of being overwhelmed by thousands of students, so we kept our advertising limited. By 2008, we felt more confident, and spread the word more widely, resulting in almost double the number in attendance.

Handling the sheer number of students is a challenge in itself and required the help of a large number of volunteers, which we were able to recruit from within the library system. Volunteers were needed to keep lines orderly and moving, as well as to direct students to each of the activities.

In these lean budget times, not spending much money was also an important goal. We kept costs down by asking for donations and bulk discounts and by calling around to compare prices on items that needed to be purchased.



Hundreds of students celebrated the tenth anniversary of The Hub. Photo credit: Kopana Terry.

Events

For both Hubbubs we had pizza, drinks, and snack food. The pizza was purchased from campus food services the first year and a local vendor the second. We found that both quality and price actually improved with the outside vendor. Snacks both years were donated by vending services who handed them out to students.

In 2007, we had belly dance instruction by a dancer who donated her time in exchange for publicity for her studio. Although students seemed interested, they were too shy to participate very much in the dancing. In 2008, we paid for a Zumba (Latin dance aerobics) instructor, which turned out to be more popular, but still was not quite the draw that we had hoped.

The 2007 Hubbub was scheduled for six video games, which fell through. In 2008,

we decided to keep the video games limited to three and relied on employees to bring in their own consoles. The games were projected on the walls, and even though only a few students at a time could play, the graphics and music jazzed up the atmosphere and many students enjoyed watching their friends play. We also added “analog” (board) games, which were surprisingly well-received.

In 2007, we had a librarian who volunteered to read palms at the last minute. Our palm reading librarian turned out to be such a hit that we brought her back for 2008

and added a second palm reader and a tarot card reader. Once again, students were fascinated by what the fortune tellers had to say.

For the 2008 Hubbub, we added a caricature artist and a balloon artist who made animals and elaborate

hats. These were both well-liked, but the balloon artist in particular really added to the carnival atmosphere as students saw others wearing balloon hats and asked for their own.

In 2007, we had Pop-A-Shot basketball, which the students liked, but we suffered some technical difficulties with one of the three machines. In 2008, a local Sephora beauty shop donated time, staff, and materials for makeovers, which were sought-after by the female students.

In 2008, we also had a new idea for a photo booth, which was set up and manned by librarians who took green screen photos with props that (after a release form was signed) were uploaded to Flickr.¹ These were also projected on the wall and on an existing flat screen TV so that students could enjoy seeing their photos immediately.

Both Hubbubs had giveaways for small items and drawings for larger prizes donated by local businesses. The small items were handed out to students and the larger prizes were drawn from names that students dropped in a box as they entered. A nice touch at the 2008 Hubbub was putting a plastic lei over the head of each student as they entered and welcoming them to the party, making the mood seem both personal and festive right from the beginning.

Evaluation

We considered both Hubbubs to be a smashing success. We had enormous crowds of students who came to the library for the first time, not for tedious drudgery, but for free, fun activities that gave the library a positive impression and made students want to return.

Tips for having your own Hubbub

- **Ask for donations.** Ask nicely at your local businesses. Many will be happy to donate small items that can be given away at the door (like bookmarks or snacks) or drawn for larger prizes (like t-shirts or restaurant gift certificates). Don't forget to make some large signs thanking your donors and to send them thank you notes afterward.

- **Prepare a budget.** Despite the use of volunteers and donations, there are still some unavoidable costs. Besides the bulk of the food, we also paid for the balloon and caricature artists and the Zumba instructor.

- **Compare prices.** You may find that a local pizza place can actually give you a better deal, including drinks and delivery, than a campus vendor. Or maybe not, but be prepared to make those calls.

- **Ask for volunteers.** For a large event like this, volunteers within the library are critical. See if any have a particular talent. Our palm reading librarian at our first Hubbub was almost an afterthought, yet she turned out to be a surprise hit. Also, make sure to get good ideas from your creative colleagues during the planning phase.

- **Re-purpose old items.** We had props for our photo booth such as hats, books, and toys that students held in their photos to make them extra silly and special. Our

board games were also old items that staff let us borrow (with the understanding that pieces might go missing).

- **Be prepared for mishaps.** For such a large event with so much going on, something is sure to go wrong. For our first Hubbub, video games were supposed to be the main event, and when our vendor fell through at the last minute, it seemed like a gap. For the second Hubbub, no one event held center stage.

- **Seek out publicity.** An event like this is an excellent opportunity to get your library on the main page of your institution's Web site. Let your publicity person know the details, and volunteer to write something up yourself. Make sure you have some good photographers on hand to capture the magic (and don't forget the photo release forms)!²

Notes

1. www.flickr.com/photos/alice_burgess/sets/72157606486545893/.
2. For more information about the Hubbub or the University of Kentucky Information Commons, contact Director Stacey Greenwell: stacey@uky.edu. *z*



Scenes from the photo booth. Photo credit: Beth Kraemer and the Hubbub Photo Booth team