

Job *of a* Lifetime

Erin Dorney

Lizz Zitron, outreach services librarian at Carthage College Hedberg Library

It is scarcely possible to sum up a day in the life of Lizz Zitron, an energetic outreach services librarian at Carthage College's Hedberg Library in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Charged with providing services and programs to both the college and local community Zitron sees herself as the cheerleader for library and information services. "If it involves helping folks understand what we have and how to access those resources. I'm your librarian!" she said in a recent interview.

With a unique institutional situation that combines campus/academic computing, media, and the library under the same umbrella, Zitron helps to promote and champion all of the services and resources of

Hedberg Library. She accomplishes this by hosting a variety of library events, planning programming for adults and children, and partnering with campus organizations to tie it all together.

Family Fun Nights and community workshops

Building on a call from the president for the college to function as a member of the local community instead of just existing as the college on the hill, Zitron developed Fam-

ily Fun Nights, a program for local families that provides free, drop-in educational and fun programs throughout the school year.

Developing an hour and a half of weekly programming for all ages can be tough, but Zitron typically turns to students and faculty in order to implement ideas: "... a lot of groups provide their own supplies; many of them have community service to complete and this helps them do it in a fun, enriching way," she says.

Zitron has worked with student organizations and fraternities to provide programming, including a fair featuring the dance department, the juggling and fencing clubs, and art students hosting 30-minute mini-

workshops. Recently, she has been working with Education professors who often have students create mock lesson plans.

When Zitron inquired if the students could create lesson plans for both adults and children and put them on in workshop format, she wound up with a slate of ready-made programming options. The library has



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been able to provide successful literacy, math, and school readiness workshops for the community this way, providing a positive experience for attendees as well as real-world experience for future teachers.

"I think libraries are in a great position to take the lead in making such initiatives happen," she says, stressing the neutral space benefit that libraries have over a classroom:

"Community members might have negative feelings or worries about entering a college classroom, particularly if they have not had access to higher education. The library is a more familiar space and concept."

Beyond the cubicle

Creating a more personal and humanizing identity for the library is another of Zitron's goals. When she first arrived, she spent a lot of time visiting faculty members, even literally stopping them on the sidewalk to introduce herself and say hello.

"That worked wonders for helping to give the library a real face and name," she says. She also believes in the importance of working outside the library building. In fact, the flexibility to do so is imperative to the success of many outreach projects. Zitron can often be found working with her laptop in the student union, getting to know students and faculty in a comfortable zone.

In addition to inviting casual conversations, which can lead to library partnerships, Zitron uses this time to familiarize herself with campus happenings: events, assignments due, and other opportunities for outreach.

She has started monthly resource demos, setting up a huge monitor in a student-heavy location and handing out free cookies. While showcasing a new streaming video resource, a student found a movie clip she wanted to watch. Within a few minutes, a crowd of students had gathered to watch the impromptu screening.

"There were audible 'awwws' when I had to pack up and leave!" she says. In

addition, Zitron proactively e-mails student leaders on a regular basis to offer assistance. She has done office hours and presentations at fraternity study hours.

"I try to come up with ideas and then pitch student groups to see who bites. They appreciate definite ideas rather than a vague, 'How can I be of service' e-mail," says Zitron.

Outreach assessment

Evaluating the impact and success of library outreach efforts requires a firm grasp of existing baseline data. Zitron currently uses basic qualitative and quantitative methods. She focuses on building returning members for Family Fun Nights and increasing the number of likes, fans, and followers on Facebook and Twitter.

After the library's first Family Fun Night of the season, their Facebook page jumped from 197 to 308 "likes" in ten days.

More importantly, interaction with fans has increased steadily, with individuals now posting pictures from the events and posting messages.

At student-centered events, Zitron keeps track of how many students show up. She also posts a "Question of the Week" on a whiteboard, accompanied by a giant pad of paper and markers. This has been a successful way to determine things like when students use the library most, what they value about library services, and changes they would like to see.

Beyond outreach responsibilities, Zitron does classroom instruction and provides reference at the information desk and during office hours. Although she has only been in this position for a year, Zitron counts herself lucky to work with individuals who have long-range and current-thinking vision without micromanagement.

In a newly created position that is mostly self-directed and self-defined, she finds her work a "labor of love," making this her job of a lifetime.

To learn more, visit theoutreachlibrarian.com or follow Lizz on Twitter: @Lizzbrarian. 