Lizz Zitron and Courtney Drew

Get a clue

Partnering with student affairs on student-centered outreach

Academic librarians often struggle with creative, effective ways to provide outreach to students. Often libraries and librarians are low on student's list of valuable campus resources. We hope by getting them into the library and interacting with us on a more informal, recreational level that we can make ourselves and our resources more accessible. How do we approach the initial challenge of getting them *in* to the library and to engage with us? Scavenger hunts are a popular, often-turned to method for freshmen orientations, library tours, and instruction. Yet, they are viewed as a "less-than" activity and used often in resignation.

At Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, an academic librarian partnered with the dean of students' office to create and implement an "Amazing Race"-style scavenger hunt to promote underused resources and services on campus. Each week teams would uncover and follow clues leading them to a task. By combining resources, access to students, and knowledge, library and dean of students staff members could create a meaningful, engaging experience that got students not only in the library, but also using other resources. A post-game survey of students reflected their new understanding and appreciation for campus services.

Getting started

The library approached Courtney Drew, director of student affairs marketing and communications, about ways to combine resources and collaborate to reach students. On a small campus such as ours, informally approaching faculty and staff to work on projects is the norm and is encouraged. At larger and/or more formal schools, the librarian might need to bring a more structured plan to student-centered offices. We will outline how we created and implemented our program, lessons learned, and how students reacted.

Both of us are fans of collaborative competition as seen in "The Amazing Race" and board games such as "Shadows over Camelot" and "Forbidden Island." During a coffee-fueled discussion on how the two departments could collaborate,

Get a Clue team photographed with a faculty member who had a piece of art on display as part of a show highlighting female staff and faculty artists. The teams had to recreate their favorite piece then photograph themselves with their piece and the artist who inspired them.

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we kept returning to the idea of a long, team-focused scavenger hunt. We knew we wanted to highlight some areas of campus that students typically glossed over; we wanted to make it tough without making it impossible; we wanted students to feel a sense of competition while still building community; we wanted them to be challenged and still have a good time. And we wanted them to learn something without hitting them over the head.

Planning a student-centered game

The first planning meeting was a casual brainstorm of ideas that produced more questions than answers: How many teams should we have? How many people will be on a team? Should we allow people to pick their own teams, or should we place them? Do the teams have to be mixed gender, or can they be single gender? Can someone sign up individually? When would this scavenger hunt happen? How long would it run? Would students even be into this sort of thing? We filled each other's heads with questions for about an hour and decided it would be best to get some student input—this was happening *for* them. As a Hall Director at Carthage, Drew is responsible for the management of one of the residence halls and supervision of its residents, and thus had access to students through regular meetings with Resident Assistants and student leaders. She relayed our questions and ideas to students in her various meetings. Through their input, specifics took shape as the fall semester came to a close. These meetings also served to create early buzz. Zitron was able to ask library student staff for their ideas and generate excitement.

Putting it on

After winter vacation, we met to make the real magic happen: hammer out the details and get the scavenger hunt going. We decided to go with a catchy title: Get a Clue, Carthage! It fit our quirky personalities, the mission of the project, and we hoped it would catch the eyes and ears of our students. While we were originally planning to run the program over the course of a semester, we decided to hold it during the month of March, an especially

dreary time in Wisconsin, when classes are established and huge assignments are not looming. We planned a simple kickoff event, and divvied up the tasks: each of us would be responsible for planning and executing two of the four week-long challenges. In addition, the library and dean of students office committed to providing prizes (more on that later). The rules were relatively basic:

• Each team would consist of three-to-five students, one of which would be designated the team captain.

• The challenges were voluntary; teams could participate in any or all of the challenges based on their interest level.

• Each week would consist of two-to-three clues that would lead to a task; teams would complete the task and post their entry on the Carthage dean of students office Facebook page. (If the library has a goal of getting more students on their Facebook page, this page could be used instead. We decided to use a page students were already using.)

• Scoring would be based on a points system: any team to complete a challenge would receive ten points, the first team to post its entry would receive an additional point, and an additional five points would go to the teams that were most "creative" and most "spirited. Scores would be updated every Monday, and the winner would be announced at the closing event.

Our campus publicity department, comprised of student designers, created a poster for the game. We provided the text, and the student designer created an eye-catching advertisement. If you are able to create your own materials, have students design them, if possible. Since this was a student-centered activity, we were grateful for that perspective in creating marketing materials. We also advertised on the library's and dean of students office Facebook pages.

We had 12 teams sign up at our Kick Off event, which pleased us considering the amount of commitments our students have. We started out by playing Human Bingo (telling them it was a test of how well they find things) and gave a $10 gift card to our campus bookstore for the prize. We went over the rules (don't do anything stupid or illegal, don't cheat, be nice)

and then had them make a team flag out of craft supplies we brought. They filled out a form with their team name, captain, and members. When they completed their flag they got their first clue, which took them to a display case in the library.

From the first clue, they had to find another clue in Albert,[1] the library's self-help knowledge-base, a resource we've struggled to promote. The first week we wanted to highlight an exhibit of faculty and staff art in our campus gallery. After visiting the exhibit as a team, the team had to reinterpret their favorite piece and then get their picture taken (with their art piece in hand) with the artist. The gallery director was thrilled with the opportunity to get more visitors. The students got to meet staff or faculty they might not have known before. Some students even made a video documenting their process (created by Cassandra "Kiwi" Pruitt, featuring teammates Kenna Krone, Amy Tucek, Ellisa Mullen, and Sarah Anderson).[2]

Each week the team captain would get the first clue on Monday. The clues were often put in places (both virtual and physical) that students don't often visit. For example, we took a picture of a specific locker in our recreation center, cut it up, and made a puzzle they had to put together. It came with a math problem (using numbers significant to our school) that gave them the locker combination. Inside the locker were magnets advertising the library's help request system, which students can use to get help with all of our services and resources. By filling out a help ticket, they got a clue sent to them. Other times we hid clues in the library catalog, in dean of students' policy Web pages, a small chapel on campus, in the Writing Center, and so forth. We had planned the hunt to include spring break with the specific intention of including the "Bring Carthage with You" challenge, which required students to submit a picture or video of their spring break destination *with* some representation of Carthage, as well.

The competition was tough throughout the entirety of the scavenger hunt, and ended even closer: a tie for first place, with only five points separating the first- and second-place teams. The project overall was definitely a success. The pictures and videos posted on the Facebook page were fantastic and now serve as great recruitment resources for prospective students.[3] Teams that participated this year were already excited about the idea of another scavenger hunt next year.

Most of the challenges we faced were based on time and timing. Our students are incredibly busy already; adding anything to their already stacked plates can be difficult. While we tried to combat this by telling teams they didn't have to participate in *all* challenges to participate in the hunt, those that only participated in one or two were not able to stay in pursuit of the top spots/prizes, which may have been a deterrent. Doing a shorter version in terms of length and/or number of clues would be a way to increase student participation.

Of 17 students who responded in our post-hunt survey, the majority stated that they had learned something new about Carthage, and that it is an effective learning tool for participants. For example, in the post-game survey they named specific library resources. Students thought the game would make an excellent activity for the first month of school. Teams with freshmen members stated that the game helped those members learn more about the campus and library. Specific feedback we got included:

What we should keep:
- "Teaching different aspects of the library."
- "The puzzle leveling was a good idea. Having to go through several challenges to get to the final clue was a nice change of pace from solve-this-you-win."
- "The searching of clues, the clue submissions through various library services online, and the nature of the tasks (creative and open ended)."

When asked about its effectiveness as a learning tool:
- "I think it would be a great thing to do with the CSS classes (College Success Seminar, required first-year student course) so that you could learn them as a freshman. I'm a junior, and I still didn't know about some of the tools we used."
- "Yes, for incoming freshmen or individuals who do not pay attention to the resources that they have, it is a great way to find and use those resources."

• "This was an effective learning tool because it got the participants out there and involved on campus."

• "Yes and no. Yes, because it gets people to think about what resources are on campus. And No, because many more resources could have been included."

When asked about what they learned:

• "Yes, I didn't know about Albert or how to use the task logger."

• "Absolutely! I thought it was great how the resources were incorporated into the hunt. It required you to learn how to use the resource in order to figure out the clue."

• "I don't have any classes in the JAC (Johnson Arts Center), so having to go there for several reasons gave me an excuse to explore the building."

The completion of this year's Get a Clue has gotten us amped about stepping up our game for next year's hunt, especially having learned from our successes and challenges. Student feedback suggested that we come up with more puzzle-type clues and tasks, harder challenges,

and adding a relay race or physical challenge. We'd like to incorporate cooperative challenges, and perhaps some sort of "object of the week," with the intention of providing additional ways of gathering points that might not be so time intensive. We also plan to encourage a stronger variety in methods of completing and posting tasks. The winners each week had typically posted a compilation video of the clues and tasks. While these types of videos are awesome, they can also be intimidating for students who are not particularly skilled at video shooting/editing.

Collaborating to achieve shared goals around student programming enabled our departments to think and act bigger. Sharing staff, supply, and time resources took the burden off of one budget in order to create a high-quality program. And we discovered our specialized skills and access to students complemented each other incredibly well. We hope our success and lessons learned will help other academic librarians seek out partners across their campus.

ACRL Discussion Groups

Balancing Baby and Book: Sunday, January 22, 4:00-5:30 p.m. *Topic: Meet with other parents to discuss the challenges of balancing family and professional interests.*

Copyright: Saturday, January 21, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. *Topic: Orphan works and the HathiTrust litigation*

Heads of Public Services: Saturday, January 21, 4:00-5:30 p.m. *Topic: Assessing public services and public services redesign*

Information Commons: Saturday, January 21, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. *Topic: Follow-up discussion about assessment of your commons. What aspects of your commons have you assessed? How? What assessment tools are effective? How do you respond to these assessments to improve the quality of facilities or service?*

Library and Information Science Collections: Sunday, January 22, 8:00-10:00 a.m. *Topic: Current issues*

MLA International Bibliography in Academic Libraries: Saturday, January 21, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Media Resources: Meeting virtually. *Contact Catherine H. Michael, cmichael@ithaca.edu Topic: Media Resources and the Law*

New Members: Sunday, January 22, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. *Topic: What I Wish I'd Learned in Library School*

Personnel Administrators & Staff Development Officers: Saturday, January 21, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.; Sunday, January 22, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. *Topic: A discussion of topical issues, emerging trends, and best practices by personnel and staff development managers.*

Scholarly Communication: Sunday, January 22, 4:00-5:30 p.m. *Topic: The topic and speakers are chosen 60 to 90 days before the conference based on issues that are most relevant at that time.*

Undergraduate Libraries: Monday, January 23, 8:00-10:00 a.m. *Topic: Issues surrounding library services and collections geared specifically for undergraduates.*

University Libraries Section. Social at the Magnolia Hotel. 5:30-7:00 p.m. Contact: Jason Martin, jason.martin@ucf.edu

Sunday, January 22
Science and Technology Section. Dinner. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Contact: John Meier, meier@psu.edu ✎

We've already scheduled our next Get a Clue scavenger hunt for spring 2012. This time with the idea in mind to recruit student leaders and staff from our departments to assist in planning and implementing the next amazing race across campus.

Notes

1. The Albert self-help knowledgebase is available at albert.carthage.edu.

2. The student-created video is available at http://youtu.be/Xv3eC-xpRbs.

3. The Dean of Student's Office is on Facebook at www.facebook.com/carthagedos. ✎