

21st Century Outreach for Innovative Librarians

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AT THE
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Innovator: Alexa Azzopardi

Alexa Azzopardi is a Public Services Librarian at Houston Community College - Stafford and the faculty advisor for the library's student group, The Library Connection (a.k.a. TLC).

Having started her career in an elementary classroom, she transitioned to teaching engineers at Ford Motor Company. As a graduate of Wayne State University's LIS program in 2001, Alexa has been a librarian in a variety of settings – public school, one of Ford Motor Company's libraries, and as a community college librarian where she found her niche with the best of both worlds of teaching and librarianship.

When she's not on the Reference Desk or working with "her kids" in TLC, you might find her trying to corral her two, yappy Miniature Schnauzers, Dewey and LC, or exercising her creativity with various art forms.



If you don't organize your books with Dewey Decimal, you tend to use LC call numbers. (Dewey – left, LC – right)

Project Focus

How do you get students to come to the library? You can sometimes make them go to scheduled orientations, but how do you get them to see the library as a destination and someplace that they want to go to? Once they get there, faculty see some of the skills they're lacking – both academic and life skills.

Librarians are FACULTY. We teach. What do we teach? The short answer is “information literacy” which is just like any other literacy – being knowledgeable and competent in an area. For librarians this means being able to find and use information proficiently, but is that it? Is that all we teach? Is that all that we *can be* teaching? The answer is “no”. There's *much more* that we can be teaching.

What if we took the opportunity to fill in the gaps of students' ability and knowledge in ways that traditional educational practices can't? What areas could we fill? What new knowledge, skills, and experiences could we offer students? While traditional classes have specific objectives that must be taught and mastered, this leaves a wide range of knowledge that is open for libraries to focus upon, and it now becomes dependent on the interests and goals of libraries and individual librarians. It also eliminates the need for mastery of a topic. Librarians can focus on introducing skills and topics of interest without needing to track achievement knowing that some seeds of knowledge will grow with interest, time and practice.

Education has become so structured with outcome based education that it leaves little time for exploration and personal growth. Some people may question why some of these activities are necessary. “Didn't students already learn this?” “This seems juvenile to me.” The fact is that students are coming to college without the requisite skills in many areas – academic, technical, social, and life skills – as well as the “grit” needed to persevere. Consequently, libraries can also teach skills that students lack. Filling this gap can lead to that student's success and subsequent retention.

If you're going to do library outreach through programming, how do you do it? It seems like the library profession attracts introverts, so library outreach may not be your bailiwick. You can do outreach with a little bit of help, and that's where this multifaceted, innovative project comes in. All together in one place, librarians will find:

- Areas where outreach can be done and why it needs to be done
- “Lesson Plans” detailing how to do various activities
- Faculty development training on how and why to do library outreach
- Sharing of physical resources for library outreach
- Librarians who specialize in a specific area of outreach visiting other libraries to assist those librarians in doing outreach

Why is any of this innovative? There is professional literature saying that we should be doing outreach, and these might even be a paragraph or chapter on programming.

However, the literature doesn't tell you how to do it or what your programming could look like. It's only by running across what other libraries are doing at their location that you might see something and think you might want to do that at your own library. What if somebody not only brought those ideas together in one place, but tested them, and then told you how to do it and pitfalls to watch out for? That's what this project is! Think of it as a lesson plan for outreach events.

Some of these activities make use of equipment that can be expensive – especially when you may only use it once or twice a year. This is where sharing the cost and the resource is beneficial. While some resources aren't that expensive, librarians should not have to pay for materials out of their own pocket but should be paid for by HCC.

Data: Background and Empathy

When I was hired at HCC, I was told that I would start a student group, and that launched my adventure into college library programming, and starting a student group opened up avenues for many different types of learning. Some of our first activities were *Gaming in the Library*, and I quickly made the decision to stick with card and board games so that students would talk with each other as well as develop critical thinking skills. Other activities followed – each with different learning opportunities, but the unexpected benefit in all of this was mentoring my student group, teaching them how to plan and execute the activities and – inadvertently - teaching them leadership skills. While you don't need a student group to do library outreach, it definitely adds another layer of teaching opportunities. It also provides extra hands and access to financial resources to execute the events.

Other benefits of doing library outreach include:

- Getting to know students in a different way
- Working with other departments
- It's fun!

When I started the library's student group, there wasn't much out there that gave directions on how to do library outreach or how to run a student group – especially at the college level. Consequently, the early days were much more about trial and error and figuring out what all of this was going to look like. While everyone who starts something new will have a learning curve, we can shorten the learning curve by sharing information and personal experience. Included in this project are the things that I've learned along the way and specifics about activities. I have tested each of these activities - often with the help of my student group, The Library Connection.

Project Design & Tools

Objective:

- To increase outreach activities in libraries across HCC
- Training librarians as to why we need to be doing outreach and how to get started
- Giving librarians “lesson plans” on how to do a variety of activities
- Provide some of the physical supplies that are needed which can be shared among the libraries (i.e. button maker, prize wheel, puzzles)

Tools:

- LibGuide with activity “lesson plans” - <https://library.hccs.edu/outreach>
- Provide some of the supplies that are needed which can be shared among the libraries (i.e. button maker, prize wheel, puzzles)
- Training sessions on student groups and outreach

Activities:

- Training sessions for librarians covering:
 - Why we do outreach
 - Scheduling
 - Tools of the Trade
 - Other topics as needed
- Visiting Librarian – At the invitation of campus librarians, librarians who have gained proficiency in a certain type of activity (i.e. 3D printing) may visit those campuses to either do the activity or demonstrate to the resident librarians how to do an activity.

Intended Impact:

Change librarianship at HCC and thus impact student growth both academic and personal. A secondary impact would be student perseverance and retention.

Product Prototype, Test & Feedback

Training Sessions

To launch this project, professional development will need to be scheduled for HCC librarians. These training sessions could initially focus on a small group of librarians who are already doing outreach, but it is best when outreach is done by the entire library staff. Because this training will most likely be done through the library's own Library Training Academy with a certain number of hours of attendance required, it is assumed that many HCC librarians will attend this training. This project is designed to give fresh ideas for librarians already involved with outreach activities and inspire others to start.

Material Purchase

For some of the activities, materials will need to be purchased and processed as traditional library material for checkout to individual librarians. These items include a button maker, prize wheel(s), and puzzles. Funds also need to be acquired for these purchases.

Actual Impact

While student learning, growth and persistence can be very difficult to measure and track, impact can be measured by an increase in librarian outreach activities and thus more students impacted.

Conclusion & Reflection

Building relationships and working with students is vitally important. I see them grow in many areas of their lives – not just academics. I hear the words “thank you” a lot. Students come back after leaving HCC to let me know how they’re doing. A student even dropped by to say goodbye on the way to the airport to leave the country. Librarians make a difference.

Changes I’ve made on my own campus have been profound, but now I want to influence librarianship at HCC as well as other colleges. These strategies should be talked about in the professional literature and taught in the library schools.

We can do more as academic librarians. We can be better teachers, and we can mentor our students with these innovative techniques.

We can make a difference!

Appendix A – Bibliography

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