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Outreach in the Academic Library

Academic Libraries might be missing the concept of outreach, sure they are available to assist in locating resources, but do they show they care about the students who come through their doors. Outreach means to surpass in reach, academic libraries have a wide reach being the center of campus. Academic libraries have more to offer than books and databases. They are ready to share knowledge about many different subjects. These subjects help students to succeed in achieving academic goals and life goals. To “recognize the diverse nature of the learning community, including the varieties of learning styles, attitudes, educational levels, life experiences, cultures, technology skill levels, and other learner variables such as proximity to the campus itself (distance learning students)” (ACRL). The mission is a complex one, that is it’s always changing due to the institution's cultural climate. Academic Libraries have their “finger on the pulse” of trends and how students are getting their assignments done. “Finding information when you’re in college is going to be different than doing high school research. It’s likely you will rely more on library resources and less on Google” (Martin, np).

Academic libraries are usually the largest building on campus and walking in can be overwhelming. Students might feel as if they are bothering the librarian at the desk. Or worse they may think as college students they should already know the answer. If students do not come

into the library how will they know what the library has to offer? The answer is to surpass in reach, beyond the desk or the front door. How about marketing the library and all it's services. Student outreach programs are all around campus, and joining forces there are common goals. In Maria Atilano's article *Reaching Out and Reaching In: Prioritizing Kindness and Collaboration with Student Outreach*, she writes about the University of North Florida's Thomas G. Carpenter Library's marketing and outreach initiatives. "Increasing outreach to students begins with listening to them"(353). Academic librarians have to connect with the campus community to understand what they need. UNF implemented breakfast at the library during the first week of fall semester at the Research Help Desk. The work begins right away, students being new to campus have an opportunity to meet and get something delicious. "However, students need more than to be bombarded with information about databases, course reserves, and research tools. Sometimes the easiest and most impactful library resource to promote is an emotional response" (353). Student success is the main goal but "instilling a warm and fuzzy feeling--especially when it revolves around the library"(354). When the library prioritizes kindness and goodwill students will not feel intimidated to ask for assistance.

Joining forces with other campus outreaches can produce a sustainable relationship. The use of the library meeting rooms. If research assistance is needed embedding a subject librarian at the meeting. Handing out nutritional snacks with the student wellness center during healthy campus week in the library when the library is at its busiest. And during finals week handing out treats with encouraging messages to support students studying. In the case of UNF student groups; LGBT Resource Center, Athletics, and the President's Office passes out cookies, granola bars, and water bottles, by collaborating the budget is bigger and more people pitch in to help.

Academic Libraries are the heart of the parent institution and to make that true, kindness and goodwill must be the inspiration for outreach. The academic library can “reflect changes in the institution and learning community through regular review and revision when appropriate”(ARCL). Outreach initiatives can connect librarians with students and faculty not just in the first week of classes but throughout the year.

Reference

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