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Strategies for Planning and Promoting Library Services to New Users

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Strategies for Planning and Promoting Library Services to New Users

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Abstract

A team of academic librarians is using a set of common strategies – assessment,
advocacy and advertisement - to develop and enhance health information services and
programs to an urban campus community and beyond. As a means of meeting the
challenge of disseminating and promoting a large number of new information
resources and skills to current library patrons and to new user populations, these
strategies inform a refocused program for on-site library instruction, a current health
information outreach initiative and planning for a new health outreach initiative. By
sharing the methods and results of these strategies in consort with a high level of
collaboration among librarians and by forging new partnerships with organizations
outside of the library, librarians can efficiently manage the challenge of expanded
clientele expectations. Taken together, these activities are promising practices that
may be especially useful for planning new programs. This paper will describe the
representative programs and the purposes of the strategies employed to enhance
existing programs and to develop new ones.

Introduction

Awareness of the wealth of new information resources and skills required to
effectively use the information retrieved are essential to a students, faculty and staff in
health sciences disciplines and to those outside of the university that may not have
ready access to a library, its services and resources. Reaching new users with new
services and re-engaging current clientele with revitalized approaches are important
challenges for libraries today. These challenges afford libraries with exciting
opportunities to be more innovative with educational programming and service
delivery and to gain new advocates. This paper will discuss new initiatives from an
urban academic library system and highlight key findings that can be helpful for
planning and promoting new approaches and services to new users.

New Service Initiatives

The use of a cycle of assessment, advocacy and advertisement is a promising practice

for the enhancement of, and planning for instructional programming and service delivery that target campus and community clientele. As representative examples of this approach, advertising strategies that use special branding are applied to a new series of workshops; community assessment and advocacy strategies, supporting a large-scale health information outreach program focused on public health providers, are outlined; and the development of a new health information outreach program aimed at school nurses and school media specialists utilizes the lessons learned from both programs and will likely contribute new insights into the value of our promising practices.

Fridays@Shiffman Learning Café Series from the Shiffman Medical Library

In an effort to improve library services by heightening awareness of new information resources and tools and to meet the changing educational needs of primary clientele, the library's education team explored new approaches for delivering library education programs to enhance extant programs embedded in the formal curricula of the campus' health sciences colleges. *The Fridays @ Shiffman Learning Café Series* was launched in Fall, 2003 and was based initially on the results of a survey to ascertain the School of Medicine's faculty development needs. From its inception, attendee feedback was solicited in order to continue to refine the series: questions were posed in a standard workshop evaluation form and the registration process, conducted through the library's e-mail reference service, afforded librarians with the opportunity to interact with actual and potential registrants. The weekly one-hour workshops demonstrate and highlight essential and new library resources, as well as teach tools and techniques to support the attendees' teaching and learning, research and clinical care work.

The invigoration of this library education program includes developing an identity by "branding" the service with an easily identifiable name and customized logo, workshop titles appealing to our clientele's immediate learning needs, and providing a non-threatening training environment that supports an interactive learning atmosphere with hands-on activities. *Fridays @ Shiffman* has demonstrated increasing success as seen in the diversity of new workshop topics and number of class offerings including requests for unanticipated repetition. The importance of advertising as a major component of a comprehensive publicity plan will be outlined.

Urban Health Partners

In addition to enhancing and revitalizing existing library services, new library services were implemented to reach new user groups. The *Urban Health Partners* [1] program was created to develop and deliver customized on-site training programs and information services for health providers serving at-risk communities in Southeastern Michigan, including a large Arab American population. To gain a better understanding of the information needs of health providers serving at-risk communities in Michigan, collaborative approaches and extensive planning with local agencies, community-based organizations, and community members were employed.

Techniques for conducting a community needs assessment will be highlighted.

Healthy Schools, Healthy Children: An Information Initiative

The goal of the *Healthy Schools, Healthy Children Initiative* is to promote an awareness of the array of health information services and resources available to school media specialists and school nurses. Because many school nurses and school media specialists cover multiple schools and have very little time to conduct extensive library research, academic libraries can play an important role in supporting their work. This role may be especially meaningful in an urban environment where health and environmental issues are acute and can benefit from the latest, most accurate information. Web-based "toolkits" are one way that libraries can provide reliable information resources to support urban school health issues, such as asthma and lead poisoning detection and prevention, in a convenient one-stop location easily accessible by school nurses and school media specialists from their workplaces or homes. Toolkits, customized for the particular needs of this clientele, provide timely and accurate information resources as well as links to library services such as online reference and research support.

Establishing partnerships with district-based school media specialists and school nurses through state-wide organizations, district-wide contacts and library and information science education programs are promising methods for introducing and advocating for the value of the academic library as a partner. In this case, the academic library can support the work of both the media specialist and the nurse, benefiting all interests. Engaging school media specialists and school nurses through community assessment techniques is useful both to ascertain their needs and to raise awareness of the latest health information resources. Once initial resources and services are made available, school nurses and school media specialists may, in turn, serve as advocates for access to library-provided health information among teachers and students within a particular school or district. Tips for advocating the library as an asset will be discussed.

Promising Practices

Three essential elements have been identified from the new initiatives for successfully planning and promoting services to new user groups. These elements are assessment, advocacy, and advertisement.

Assessment

Conducting a community needs assessment is vital to the success of any new service or program. A needs assessment includes the process of "identifying and discovering the needs of a target audience" and it a critical start to planning health information programs (Burroughs, 2000). Conducting a needs assessment sets the stage for overall service goals and can be accomplished in various ways. The *Urban Health Partners* program employed a variety of strategies: an initial questionnaire assessing the target organizations' access to libraries and the Internet was analyzed, project staff attended

and participated in local health fairs, conducted face-to-face interviews with key leaders and community stakeholders, and utilized focus groups to gain a better understanding of the information needs of health providers serving at-risk communities in Southeastern Michigan. A needs assessment can also illuminate any obstacles or barriers to accessing information resources and library services which can ultimately shape new service initiatives.

In addition, focus groups were instrumental in obtaining value-added input. Focus groups consisting of health providers were used to pretest the timeliness, relevancy, and to ensure that services and resources being developed for health providers serving a large Arab American community were culturally appropriate. The importance of conducting interviews and utilizing focus groups as part of a needs assessment ensures that libraries are delivering relevant and meaningful new services to target audiences.

Community needs assessments are also an opportunity to advocate for the services and resources available through the library to community organizations that may not be aware of what is available to their staff and clientele. An often overlooked by-product of community engagement through assessment processes such as those outlined above, is that key individuals involved in the assessment process emerge from it as informed opinion leaders or 'new stakeholders' that subsequently advocate for the value of the new program among their colleagues and peers.

Advocacy

The American Library Association defines advocacy as "the process of turning passive support into educated action by stakeholders" (2004). Cultivating partnerships, creating strategic alliances, and demonstrating institutional value increase visibility for the library and the institution. In order to promote libraries and foster support for new programs, libraries should align new services and programs with institutional and library strategic missions. Urban outreach is for Wayne State University a critical element of its mission.

Administrative support for new initiatives is also critical and can be achieved by demonstrating the value of shared library resources and expertise across several disciplines, expanded patron reach, and the increased availability for funding opportunities that innovative programs generate. To maximize the chance of success, libraries are encouraged to develop opportunities to promote collaborative efforts across several disciplines and departments. Networking with colleagues both in the library and other disciplines proved useful with the *Healthy Schools, Healthy Children Initiative* when trying to make contacts with the target audience. Sometimes overlooked, keeping colleagues apprised of current research and new initiatives can lead to new contacts with members of the target audience. Colleagues can also provide constructive feedback regarding the development of a new program and approaches used to reach new audiences.

Advertisement

Effective advertising is fundamental to the success of any new or reinvented service. The *Fridays@Shiffman Learning Café Series* "brand" affords a unique identity for this service and creates an advertising strategy that is recognizable and provides busy clientele with the predictability of instructional workshops at a specific time and place with light refreshments offered. The branding strategy also includes entitling each program so that it reflects known user needs (instead of titles that simply describe a particular library resource). The brand also provides an organizing principle for developing the publicity plan's flyers and announcements and promotes word-of-mouth publicity. To reach potential attendees in a large and complex university setting, multiple listings of events, bulk e-mail messages, web site notices and e-mail newsletters are used to advertise up-coming events; the series brand makes it easier to regularly produce these notices. Over time, clientele look forward to the latest offerings and can find them easily with the eye-catching logo of the brand. It is likely that this branding strategy for advertisement has contributed to both attendance at the workshops and a heightened awareness of the range and diversity of resources and services available through the library.

Conclusion

Assessment, advocacy, and advertisement are key to successfully reaching new users or recapturing users with new approaches. Once a program or service model has been developed and tested with some success, it can be adapted to reach new users. The *Healthy Schools, Healthy Children Initiative* will conduct a needs assessment to gain a better understanding of the health information needs of school nurses and school media specialists using strategies and interviewing techniques established with the *Urban Health Partners* program. In addition, the *Healthy Schools, Health Children Initiative* will create a publicity plan similar to the one that was developed for the *Fridays@Shiffman Learning Café Series* to systematically and efficiently advertise new services to new users. Adapting successful service models, developing a comprehensive publicity plan, and creating an identity or "branding" library education programs with a recognizable logo are promising practices for reaching new users on campus and beyond.

References

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Endnote

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