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## Nothin' to it but to Do It! Simple and Effective Outreach to Faculty

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## Nothin' to it but to Do It! Simple and Effective Outreach to Faculty

### Abstract

This paper is a summary of a poster presentation, originally presented at the 2019 Annual Conference of the SCLA, which described a simple and effective method for outreach to faculty, encouraging them to schedule library instruction. Such a method can be used to improve communication with faculty and grow a library instruction program.

### Keywords

instruction, information literacy, outreach, marketing, faculty collaboration

## **Introduction**

The most important thing a library can do is exist: opening our doors and providing access to information in a welcoming space where users can freely interact with information and their community. The biggest hurdle for library marketing, then, is making sure that people in your community know that you exist. In my experience, outreach to faculty, and library marketing in general, is often over-complicated. There are various reasons for this. First, there seems to be a level of humility in our profession that prevents us from openly and directly advertising how awesome we are (Yoon, 2014). There also seems to be a greater need for libraries to do marketing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we compete with other methods of finding information (Bell, 2017).

There is also, of course, pressure to increase library patronage and usage of library materials in order to prove the library's worth for the purposes of procuring funding, even as library budgets begin to stabilize after deep cuts during the last decade (ExLibris, 2019). For these, and probably many other reasons, I believe that library outreach programs are often over-thought and over-complicated. We are trying too hard. I support a simple, back to basics, human centered approach – and when I tried such an approach as part of an effort to grow our library instruction program, it worked pretty well! This effort was made during my time as Public Services Librarian at Spartanburg Community College during the 2018-2019 academic year.

## **Objectives**

At the beginning of the fall semester of 2018, my objective was to continue existing relationships with faculty and build new relationships working towards to the goal of increasing the library's information literacy instruction program. At the community college where I worked at the time, we had numerous new faculty and adjunct instructors every semester, so being able to create and build relationships with them was critical to our goal of expanding the instruction program. The major

obstacle I saw in the way of meeting this objective was the fact that the library, up to that point, had no comprehensive communications going out to the faculty as a whole. The Library website listed instruction sessions as an available service, and library instruction was advertised at faculty orientation, but sessions were only scheduled when a faculty member reached out to the library. Implementing a comprehensive, consistent outreach approach aimed to reverse that pattern.

## **Methods**

The outreach methods I used were purposely very simple. I have learned from talking to faculty members that they are often very busy and overwhelmed. In my experience, they respond best to simple, straightforward communications. Anything more complex will take too much of their time. I have also learned that email is both a blessing and a curse. Yes, it is the most commonly used method of communication on campus. But, that also means that faculty receive a mountain of email messages every single day and a 'friendly reminder' email from the librarian might be easily overlooked. So, I decided on an intentionally simple and direct approach.

For the first time in Fall 2018, we sent out an email at the beginning of the semester to all faculty and adjuncts announcing that library instruction would be available and advertising the different topics that a session can cover. This is not my most effective technique due to the high volume of emails that faculty receive, as stated above. However, email is the primary tool of communication for most faculty. Also, it is helpful to establish a baseline of outreach. Other methods can build from here.

When using email to communicate with faculty, I have found that less is more. Librarians may be tempted to include too many questions, offers, or information in an email to a faculty member hoping to make the most of one interaction. This is not my approach. Again, faculty members are too busy to engage with us on more than one topic at a time. If you are communicating about scheduling library instruction, keep the focus on that, and only ask for the information that you really NEED to plan the

session. I often remind myself of this quote when communicating with faculty: “Assertive. Effective. Short sentences. A numbered list. Just like on BuzzFeed” (Alderman, 2017, p. 49).

Another method I employed was more successful than email, and even simpler to do. I made reminder notes using Microsoft Word, printed onto half sheets of paper, see Figure 1. These notes reminded faculty members to schedule their instruction sessions before the library’s calendar filled up. This creates a sense of urgency (genuine or embellished) and implies that all faculty members should be scheduling sessions, even though they are not required to, and without explicitly asking them to. I hand-delivered these reminders to faculty mailboxes and office drop-boxes, where faculty members found them and were able to follow up with scheduling at their convenience.

Figure 1: Outreach Note (actual size 8.5x6 in.)

**Don't forget!**  
Contact [jcollier@presby.edu](mailto:jcollier@presby.edu) to schedule your library instruction classes!  
Our calendar fills up fast, so schedule soon to get your preferred dates!  
More about library instruction at [lib.presby.edu](http://lib.presby.edu).



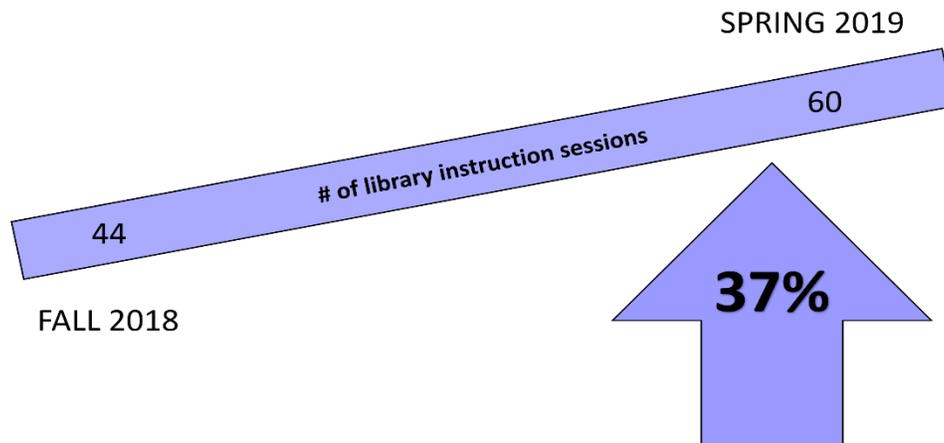
The best part was, one of the departmental lead instructors got the reminder note and it prompted her to send a strongly worded reminder email to all the instructors in her department. Surprise, surprise; the instruction requests came flooding in!

## Results

Since the outreach efforts began in Fall 2018, some impact was seen in the fall semester as instructors continued to schedule library instruction sessions into November. The biggest impact, though, was seen in an increase of scheduled instruction sessions for the Spring semester of 2019. As

shown in Figure 2, there were 44 class sessions of library instruction in Fall 2018, and 60 class sessions in Spring 2019, which was a 37% increase.

Figure 2: Increase in Number of Library Instruction Sessions



### Discussion & Conclusion

If your library is not currently doing any direct outreach or communication with faculty encouraging them to schedule instruction sessions, start doing it! Even you advertise instruction on the website, direct outreach makes a huge impact, as shown by my results. Don't underestimate the impact of person to person communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when our default is to communicate in digital formats.

Also, do not underestimate the impact of one initial contact, and the way it can kick off a productive collaborative relationship. If a faculty member has a good experience working with you once, more collaboration will follow. For them, this typically means that it was a simple process. Don't let your first impression be that you bombarded them with emails about scheduling or pressured them to share lesson plans and assignments. Let your first impression be that you were accessible, flexible and capable. Then, stay in constant contact with them. Don't let an email go un-answered, and keep reminding them of things at every turn. Be direct, communicative, and consistent.

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