

## Outreach in library! Serving beyond the Walls

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**Abstract**

Outreach has become an essential component of library services in academic libraries. The paper discusses various components of outreach programs with the support of reviewing the published literature in the recent past. The paper highlights the trends and ongoing practices at various organizations along with the popular practices.

**Keywords:** Outreach programs; Academic libraries; University libraries.

**Introduction**

Libraries are service oriented organizations; in this context the concept of outreach is intricately related with the library services and fitting the current scenario of service trends. Libraries are expanding their roles and reach into the university and other organizations "not only for fulfilling the information needs of our campus community, but also as an unofficial arm of student support services (Tammi and Bishop, 2018)." Various aspects such as student related specific services, learning communities, and library support services are able to coordinate with the students and other learning communities. Student engagement and development of trust between the libraries and learners is the basic element towards outreach. The insight is required into the planning and service level of an outreach program including the outreach scope and management of the same.

The evaluation of outreach program involving the students and other component communities is very significant. The outreach programs discern the significance of collaboration with learning communities and support. The collaboration and linking to the learning community on campus towards the various special events for scholars in the library, are designed with the scope that

outreach is student-focused. This scope includes the permissions for library staff to speed up the channeling of outreach activities. The outreach liaison involves the communication with the collaborators, other teams such as undergraduate, post graduate and research students. Certain components such as "moments of delight, surprise, spectacle, and comfort" are a few stages in the context of users' responses. Instead of becoming too experimental library including suggestions by building consensus for management, the role as creative and innovative library envisages the outreach programs. The few successes of outreach program's administration include fresh ideas for future events for an academic year. Working the initiatives into the strategic plan during transitional period with a roadmap going forward; student success is the priority of outreach program as students are the focus areas.

**University Collaborations and Partnerships**

Having an eye on the big picture, regularly scheduled events and services, coordinated programs with other library programming endeavors to remain fixed towards the goal and stay focused. The optimum use of library resources is also fulfilled by outreach planning. Once the

library meets the goals of outreach programs, fund allocation proves fruitful with the support of outgoing, well-trained professionals for the organization of an event, etc. Universities may seek potential partners to approach with new ideas, and collaborations. The following approaches support an understanding of needs:

- a. *Reference interview*: to think about the needs of learners
- b. *Conversation Hour programs*: useful for the foreign language students.
- c. *De-Stress Fest*: to organize events settled into familiar tradition for scholars.

The optimization of dwindling resources has always been a concern of academic libraries while reaching to the maximum number of users and types of users in an academic setting. The input of time and finances is one of the deciding factors for planning outreach campaigns and programs in institutions of higher education. The identification of various groups, and the determination of specific irregular subgroups to receive the services, or undeserved people, may be a component of outreach programs. The scalability of outreach programs is crucial to have a range of services and population.

### Why Outreach?

The need to understand outreach in a broader context is inevitable. Sure, it is not strategies about marketing library resources and services entirely; yet involves some of the marketing strategies to create awareness about the outreach programs and services. Andrea Wrigh has discussed two main goals, "The first goal was to increase awareness and knowledge of a few key scholarly communication issues – publishing models, author copyrights, and impact metrics, particularly among the faculty – and spark dialogues about how we create, share, and consume scholarly information in a new, ever-changing environment. The second goal was to pilot a model of scholarly communication outreach—a series of guest lectures by experts throughout the academic year—at a liberal-arts university." Since the goal involves building and maintaining a long-term relationship with the user community and (a relationship with events?) events, most of the times beyond library premises (Cummins, 2007), WHAT is based on few models such as "liaison model", which involves the library staff to reach and link to the various groups in the organization, usually academic sections or departments and "outpost librarianship," as followed and exercised in "dorm

outreach". Why outreach is significant in current times may be comprehend by the following aspects:

- a. *Enriching Collaborative learning*: Collaborative learning requires opportunities to support the learners' community based on student services or other students' related units.
- b. *Reaching to underserved or extended groups*: Outreach is one of the ways to reach and serve underrepresented students groups. It is also significant to reach students who are an "invisible minority" (Phelps 2015), and for understanding those student groups and their needs.
- c. *Providing supports other than educational support*: Libraries may play a great role in outreach to communities through entrepreneurial support, writing workshops, and serving persons with disabilities (Samson, 2011) with the inclusion of assistive technology (Remy and Seaman, 2014).

### Various Outreach Strategies

The development of outreach strategies involve the study of community, as well as requirements and processes to reach them. Sometimes the approaches are ad-hoc (Carter and Seaman, 2011) or short-term planning which do not serve long term goals. The implementation of active outreach processes, as well as passive outreach activities in the background should be done. The presence of scalable planning and testing of sustainability are a few of the required attributes of outreach services planning. These examples of active outreach services are not scalable, unlike passive outreach planning; but function as crucial component towards reaching the community and developing close relations that can translate into an organizational partnership. The active outreach approach involves methods for working in close proximity with users, and creating opportunities for direct responses from the community. Another example for such a direct and close partnership is found in the services for differently-abled persons on campus; such as feedback about their accessibility, removing barriers etc. The close and direct approaches towards the external population are also helpful in spreading the outreach services and provide opportunities to learn and connect with other people. Such approaches help the library to reach the underserved scholars in the organization by creating displays, co-hosting the events such as "mutual learning", etc. "Locally relevant and

empowering” services (Mehra and Srinivasan, 2007) have been identified to be delivered.

The exposure of innovative outreach services brings many other groups of the community before the library and this requires understanding the demographic structure of the community, as well as important demands and deadlines. For example, the use of reading halls, library guides, etc. are components of passive outreach planning include contacting the marginalized persons and getting their responses (Cannady, King, and Blendinger, 2012). The demonstration of sensible identification of target populations as well as understanding the potential users are a few significant aspects of passive outreach planning, such as displaying of photographs of outreach services towards underserved populations of marginalized communities show-cases the efforts of library among the users to spread the message. Such activities permit and establish the roles of intermediaries (support groups) as well as recognition of a library’s efforts to connect with the community.

### **Relating Outreach with Various Components of Library Functions**

Carter and Priscilla (2011) discussed that outreach is meant “to reach out to their users, to encourage use of the library and its resources, and to promote a positive image on campus and often in the community – but the activities that libraries use to fulfill these purposes run the gamut.” There has been some discussion that the term “outreach” includes “collection development and library instruction” having similar goals such as outreach services have. Carter and Priscilla also discussed that there are major aspects such as “services and the promotion of services”. These are such as “any assistance with research or information, the resources available at a library, and library facilities. Promotion of services involves marketing or the use of public relations techniques to promote these services, resources, and facilities.” The roles and labels “Embedded librarians” or “satellite librarians” have been much associated with outreach programs in libraries while developing the collaborative programs.

### **Library beyond the Walls**

In recent times we have witnessed the changing roles of academic libraries, therefore their functions, services, and structure have been

changed into learning spaces for all. The facilities in the form of technology-based spaces and services are examples of how to reach and invite campus communities. The roles of outreach programs for campus communities as well as outsiders are numerous. The advancements, developments and enhancements in the learning ways are enriched by the outreach activities. The pace of library advances beyond its premises to reach those who are either reluctant or underserved. There are certain groups on the campus which require attention in this perspective; these are “transfer students, multicultural groups, and on-campus residents”. As suggested in (Kraemer, Keyse, and Lombardo. 2003) “these programs have increased the library’s visibility, enhanced its image among the university’s students, faculty, and staff alike, and positioned it at the heart of teaching and learning on campus.” Collaboration with external communities is essential in order to reach them. Establishing liaisons with internal groups or communities should take place with the support of faculty members, student representatives and staff. To understand the specific requirements of various groups is it inevitable to separate and segregate them in the university libraries. The university libraries serve not only the campus community but also visitors from across the country. Research, and professional and career development, are a few of the factors which motivate these students, professionals and other types of visitors to reach the library. The university libraries maintain the vast collection and efficient services to cater to the users and provide opportunities for engagement in learning activities through various outreach programs. There are examples, such as:

- a. Various workshops
- b. Online research support
- c. Collaborative learning programs
- d. Displays and exhibitions
- c. Independent interaction and study spaces

### **Other types of libraries using community outreach**

#### *Academic Libraries*

Academic libraries are frequently organizing workshops and events to reach researchers and highlight the resources required by them for their scholarly work. Brown University initiated a library FYI workshop and “keys to efficiently wrangling workshop” as well as a workshop on “Citing

and Publishing Your Data". Southern Methodist University has adopted this strategy and started offering "Request a Workshop" which is based on students' preferred topics and schedules in order to adjust to their needs.

In Chinese academic libraries outreach services are considered add-on services. The word "creative service is more commonly used rather than "outreach service" in China. The primary purpose for outreach services is to cater to the library user's needs in academic libraries in China.

In Chinese academic libraries the outreach services are confined to students and faculty only, but in the US outreach services are offered beyond the walls of the library to reach the larger research community. The research community consists of not only students, faculty and staff but also the global community.

### **School Libraries**

A concept of 'IDEA' is launched to implement outreach programs in school libraries. "According to Maua, 2015 an IDEA is:

- I- Identify need
- D- Design programs
- E- Evaluate service
- A- Add new programs"

*Identify need:* The need of the students need to be identified for offering the outreach services. Identifying the problems will assist in designing programs which will enhance and support the students learning activities.

*Design Programs:* The programs are designed keeping in view the needs of the users. The programs which are affordable and also beneficial to the students are considered. When programs are designed the need identified is given priority. These programs are user friendly so that the students can comprehend them easily.

*Evaluate Service:* Constant evaluation is required to enhance and improvise the service offered by the libraries. The impact of the outreach service must be measured in order to provide it effectively.

*Add new Programs:* Programs need to be added to cater to the needs of the users. The goals and objectives must be user-oriented and must be dynamic in nature.

### **Medical Libraries**

Long ago, Fama (2005) identified two approaches to outreach:

- A *library-centered model*-in which new audiences are familiarized with the library services and.
- An *audience-centered model*- in which the librarian evaluates needs and designs a program to cater to those needs.

He also proposed that outreach goals and process deliver. The same must be continuously evaluated. Outreach programs must be evaluated and assessed regularly and its impact on readers must be appraised.

The Lamar Soutter Library at the University of Massachusetts Medical School formed the Outreach Study Group to investigate the existing models of outreach. The group evaluated the published literature and also conducted surveys across the globe to identify the trends in outreach.

### **Role of Technologies in supporting outreach programs**

According to a press release, the ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) organized a programme on Technology Support and Outreach (TECH-SOP) in New Delhi, with an aim to edify the MSMEs about the latest technological developments present in the market.

An "India Green Tech Open Challenge" was launched to motivate the MSMEs to implement green technologies.

A dedicated section on the organization's website could be created and information is to be displayed which further can be shared with the readers. The page is designed to attract and educate the readers which can enhance their knowledge.

### **Models of Outreach**

There are different popular models of outreach prevalent in society. A few are listed below:

*Twitter Outreach:* Twitter is a social networking service which allows users to post messages which are called "Tweets". This model shares information within no time across the globe. It is a simple way to share information to a mass public. The coverage is vast and covers various spectrums. It is a way to stay abreast of the latest developments in the world through another person's expression. It also

acts as marketing tool where people advertise their businesses and services to catch the attention of an audience.

*Community outreach programs:* In this type, first the group of people are identified, their needs are identified and then a program is designed to help them by education, motivation and creating awareness. The feature of Community outreach programs is to meet the needs of the users of the particular community. The benefit of this program is to assist those who are deprived from the society, underprivileged or are exploited in some or other way.

## Conclusion

The modern library services cannot be imagined without outreach services towards the users and other communities. The inclusion of innovative ideas along with the traditional housekeeping services in the library has been inevitable since the advent of technologies as well as the need to reach to larger types and number of users to serve. The academic environment motivates the library and related users to participate in outreach program to include the rest of the population.

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