

Fordham Law School

FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History

Staff Publications

Law Library

8-31-2018

Community/College Connections

Jennifer Dixon

Fordham University School of Law, jdixon22@law.fordham.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/staff_publications



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dixon, Jennifer. "Community/College Connections." *Library Journal* 31 Aug. 2018: n. pag. Online.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Library at FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History. It has been accepted for inclusion in Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History. For more information, please contact tmelnick@law.fordham.edu.

Community/College Connections

by Jennifer A. Dixon

Aug 31, 2018 | Filed in Leadership

COLLABORATION When public and academic libraries join forces, a small investment of time and effort can lead to big results and increase in services for both. Beginning in 2015, the Saint Joseph County Public Libraries (SJCPL), South Bend, IN, and Hesburgh Libraries at the University of Notre Dame have worked together to make it easier for members of the Notre Dame community to access public library materials. According to Tracey Morton, manager of user services for Hesburgh, the academic library received many requests for “leisure material” such as the latest best sellers, which are not included in the libraries’ collection development plan. Notre Dame reached out to SJCPL and received an enthusiastic response, and the collaboration built from there. Notre Dame librarians now issue SJCPL library cards on campus, and students, faculty, and staff can pick up and return their public library materials at the Hesburgh facilities.



CROSS-CHECK The partnership between St. Joseph County Public Libraries and the University of Notre Dame's Hesburgh Libraries allows students, faculty, patrons, and staff from both institutions to check out and return books at either. *Photo by Abby Vande Walle*

Morton describes the program as relatively low cost, requiring little more than an extra mail room stop-off per day at an SJCPL branch, en route to an off-site library storage space less than ten miles from Notre Dame. The program also requires staff time to issue SJCPL library cards; some growing pains were experienced as university librarians needed to learn how to create patron records in a different integrated library system (ILS). Academic librarians have also needed to become versed in issues such as residency requirements, as well as arranging loans of public library materials around the academic calendar. Notre Dame librarians leave all other tasks related to public library materials to the staff at SJCPL. SJCPL has made an effort to keep procedures simple and encouraged staff at Notre Dame to reach out whenever issues arise.

The payoff for the extra effort has been significant. The program has expanded continuously since its inception. Some 2,888 loans were made in the 2017–18 school year (and 151 new cards issued), up from 2,262 loans in 2016–17 (with 167 cards), and 740 loans in 2015–16 (and 107 cards). Morton quoted a Notre Dame graduate student who described the service as a “tremendous help,” enabling her to request children’s books from the public library and have them waiting in the same place as the academic books she needs for her research.

For the public library, this collaboration offers “a simple, and mutually beneficial, way to reach a service population that previously had low usage of our library system,” according to Lisa O’Brien, director of development and communications for SJCPL. “The collaboration has directly benefited SJCPL by increasing our circulation, expanding our visibility in the community, and improving our ability to partner with the University of Notre Dame.” Careful planning early in the process ensured that execution has been essentially issue-free. O’Brien also notes that this resource sharing has strengthened other joint SJCPL and Notre Dame projects, including a coding class developed between SJCPL youth services and the Hesburgh Libraries. “A partnership on one project may lead to more productive initiatives between the two organizations,” says O’Brien. “The relationships we’ve cultivated with community partners have only deepened our ties and given us more opportunities to meet goals while nurturing community support for the library.”

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING FOR PUBLIC PATRONS

In addition to expanding access to materials, public and academic libraries can work together to develop unique programming and bring it to new audiences that would not have been possible for either alone. In Ohio, the Cleveland Public Library (CPL), Case Western Reserve University, and Ohio State University (OSU) collaborated to develop a science literacy program entitled “Mean Green Science Machine,” targeting students in grades seven through 12. OSU also joined with the Worthington Libraries (WL) to create a series of educational science talks at the public library entitled “Science Café.” In both instances, the expertise of academic scholars combined with the public service skills of public library staff to create successful STEM programming.

Daniel Dotson, mathematical sciences librarian and science education specialist at OSU, says that the Science Café hit its stride when it shifted its programming from the OSU campus to the public library. He was “surprised at the turnout” for some of the Café events and says that “given how few came to campus, I didn’t expect three to five times as many kids to show up” at WL. OSU provides the speakers, while program organizers put effort into identifying experts who might resonate with the kids in attendance. Dotson says of the collaboration, “use each other to get access to what you need. Academic librarians know their campus and have a good feel for whom to contact for various things. Public Libraries are in touch with the community and especially kids” and know how to organize groups of youngsters in kid-friendly spaces.

Tracey Overbey, human sciences and sociology librarian at OSU, says of approaching the Physics Department at Case Western and the OSU Extension Center, “They were so excited about sharing their resources with the community. They...were trying to figure out how to connect with the community [and] were thrilled I had reached out.” The students, selected from local schools, were so eager to jump into activities with university grad students and professors that they didn’t eat all of the snacks provided for them, and parents “were excited that their student had...visited a college...and [seen] how scientists work daily on their jobs,” Overbey says.



WHIZ BANG SCIENCE Ohio students enjoy the “Mean Green Science Machine,” part of Cleveland Public Library, Case Western Reserve University, and Ohio State University’s science literacy collaboration. *Photo courtesy of Ohio State University*

The Mean Green Science Machine received financial support from a grant, and costs included paying graduate students minimum wage to commit to a few months of activities with young students. Funds were used to transport graduate student leaders to the library and purchase materials for the 90 students that participated. The program was a “great success,” says Overbey, and is ongoing at CPL. She encourages librarians to “open lines of communication” for collaboration and information sharing and not hesitate based on worries that faculty “will not have time for community involvement”: potential partners could surprise with their enthusiasm for new cooperative ideas.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Even where an academic and public library partnership doesn’t last, it can serve as a learning experience for the participating institutions and solidify relationships. The St. Louis Public Library (SLPL) and Bernard Becker Medical Library at Washington University School of Medicine partnered to present a series of health-focused information programs and library information kiosks. The partnership originated in 2011 and wrapped up by 2016.

Per Robert Engeszer, associate director at the Becker Medical Library, the program represented a joint effort to help the public library build its capacity for providing consumer health information, particularly in more economically challenged areas of the city. Originally, the medical library worked to identify expert speakers on relevant health topics. Over the years, however, the project evolved toward a focus on “wellness and lifestyle” rather than on disease-oriented medical resources, which Engeszer describes as “outside the scope of... our mission.”

“It was a good evolution, and we learned a lot from it,” says Engeszer, who notes that the public library has continued to develop interactive wellness programming that resonates with its patrons, while the medical library is developing its own health and wellness information center. He “would not hesitate” to partner with the public library again and describes the original union as an illustration of the “serendipity” that often leads to public and academic collaborations. “It’s so contacts-driven,” he says, providing a strong reason for librarians to attend conferences and events outside of their specific library type and reach out to network locally.

SHARED SPACE LEADS TO CROSSOVER CONTENT

Since 2014, Saint Paul Metropolitan State University library and a branch of the Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) have shared a building, but the two don’t just share space: they host joint programs and events that resonate with both the academic and local communities.

The academic side has made a concerted effort to connect its resources with public library patrons, issuing more than 3,000 community borrower cards. It also adapted its “information commons” area with a bank of approximately 12 computers dedicated to public community users. Shared programming has included coding classes and game nights, as well as a homework help center on the public library side that is staffed almost exclusively by university students. In addition, Metropolitan State serves a student population of primarily adult learners, some of whom are parents, and Greg Mellas, director of the institute for community engagement and scholarship, notes that university students have appreciated the ability to bring their children to kid-friendly activities while also connecting with the academic resources they need.

Mellas notes a “steep learning curve from the university side” and how “it took about ten years...to get used to the flow of the public coming into the building.” As academic librarians have grown accustomed to serving public library patrons, programming on both sides has benefited from SPPL’s many years of experience developing public-focused events, resources, and policies. Public and academic librarians have also encountered differing norms with regard to conduct, such as whether patrons should be allowed to sleep in the library—the public library had a policy against it, while academic librarians found it normal for students to nap during study breaks.

Academic/public alliances have expanded the range of what they can offer and to what users. Whether it is materials, resources, programming, or a combination, working together across library types can incorporate a range of strengths into synergies and new library services.

Jennifer A. Dixon is Electronic and Serials Librarian, Maloney Library, Fordham University Law School, New York
