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Marketing Library Workshops: A Model for Achieving Popular and Critical Success

by Catherine Stern, Alexandra Rojas, and Elizabeth Namei

While drop-in workshops can often be a vital and important component of academic library instruction programs (Manuel, 2003), it is an ongoing challenge to keep them fresh and to attract sufficient numbers of attendees to make the enterprise meaningful and worthwhile. Workshops offer an opportunity to raise the library's profile within the institution and be recognized for the work librarians do to support the college's mission. LaGuardia Community College Library has sought to achieve both popular (good attendance) and critical (enhanced college-wide recognition) success with its workshop series. The outreach initiatives described in this article brought us closer to both goals.

Background

LaGuardia Community College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY), is a large urban community college located in the borough of Queens. It has a diverse student body (students speak 128 different native languages) of over 14,317 FTE as well as 325 full-time and 796 part time faculty (LaGuardia, 2012b p. 1, 13, 50).

In 2008, after years of offering workshops open to anyone interested, but attended mostly by students, we launched a new series of workshops marketed specifically to teaching faculty. Part of the impetus for these faculty-only workshops was to “train the trainers.” In Vondracek’s (2007) study “[s]tudents listed their professors or teaching assistants as their most frequent source for research help” (p. 290); Project Information Literacy reported that, “[e]ven though it was librarians who initially informed students about using online scholarly research databases during freshmen training sessions, students in follow-up interviews reported turning to instructors as valued research coaches, as they advanced through the higher levels of their education” (Head & Eisenberg, 2009, p. 3). As a community college, LaGuardia also has a large number of part-time faculty, so we needed to offer some non-traditional outreach efforts to them. As Virtue and Esparaza

(2013) noted, “building faculty awareness can be especially challenging in community colleges, where a significant portion of the instructors are adjunct faculty who are not as easily accessible for traditional communication strategies” (p. 80).

By keeping faculty up-to-date and knowledgeable about library resources and services, we hoped to bridge the gap between the library and students through these newly engaged and informed faculty members, who would in turn help us in teaching information and research skills. At LaGuardia, “Information and Research Literacy” is one of the five general education core competencies (LaGuardia, 2012a). While responsibility for the five competencies is spread across the college, the library assumes a leadership role in teaching and assessing information and research literacy skills. These optional faculty workshops would allow us to singlehandedly market our information literacy expertise, build a community of faculty ambassadors who could spread the word to students and other campus constituents, and also ensure that interested faculty have a general awareness about library services and resources.

Our Marketing Blitz

Three librarians pooled their talents to develop the workshops and market them. Our goal was to offer three workshops each semester and we

soon arrived at the techniques we would regularly use for marketing them:

- **Faculty only.** LaGuardia is a very student-centered and democratic institution, but by gearing the workshops to faculty only we hoped to create a very relaxed atmosphere and to demonstrate our interest in supporting them in their work.
- **30 minutes.** The length of the workshop is probably the most important component of the series. Let's face it: Everyone is busy, but committing to 30 minutes is an easier sell.
- **Flyers and posters.** We created eye-catching posters and flyers which gave us a visual presence around campus. Flyers promoting the workshop were hand-delivered to each department for distribution.
- **Timely email notices.** Emails went out strategically and, most importantly, the morning of and immediately before each workshop.
- **Catchy titles and themes.** We created some silly titles (*Become a Database Diva/ Divo*) and chose some trendy topics (*Second Life, RSS feeds*) to help our workshops stand out in flooded inboxes.
- **Refreshments.** Mostly coffee, tea and cookies or some minor variation, but it helped create an inviting atmosphere which may have helped bring us returning attendees.
- **Varied presenters.** We recruited staff from within the library to present on topics about which they had expertise. While the planners were always present to create continuity, new presenters kept it interesting and fresh.

Aligning Library Workshops with College Goals

In 2011 we saw an opportunity to link our workshops more closely with a specific university/college goal, in addition to the general

education competencies. Each college within CUNY is expected to align itself with the University's targets and objectives. In 2011–12, University Target 1.4 was concerned with the "use of technology to enrich courses and improve teaching" (CUNY, 2012, p.2). At LaGuardia an annual strategic-planning process makes its way down to each academic department. The Library, as an academic department, has the familiar challenge of creating goals that will support college-wide initiatives. One objective that the Library proposed was to increase student access to articles in digital formats and to do this in part by promoting "Increas[ing] use of the electronic reserves and IDS document delivery services in the Library" (Mellow, (n.d.), p. 3). From this, the idea for our next workshop was born: *LaGuardia's 21st Century Digital Library*. In this case we departed from our

"We saw an opportunity to link our workshops with university and college goals."

preferred thirty-minute format to grab the opportunity for a one-hour slot at the College's Opening Sessions program at the beginning of the fall term.

Another opportunity presented itself when one of the members of the Library's workshop planning committee who served on the college's Academic Standing Committee was asked to contribute to the Committee's initiative to foster academic honesty by developing programming for faculty. Our workshop, *Helping Students Cite to Avoid Plagiarism* was presented with the Academic Standing Committee as a co-sponsor.

In both of these cases our attendance was far greater than for our stand-alone workshops, since the Opening Sessions program invites and attracts the entire college community to attend,

and Academic Standing is a highly regarded committee on campus.

Partnering with Established Committees and Programs as a Marketing Strategy

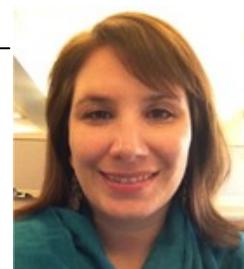
- Look for opportunities. Committee connections proved helpful.
- Adapt. Opening Sessions has a theme each year and faculty members are invited to submit proposals. We made ours fit.
- But what about the 30 minutes? Opening Sessions runs 60 minute slots; we filled it

with content and the workshop was filled with attendees.

- Ride some coattails. In both cases the marketing was in the hands of another group, each of which had college-wide prestige and recognition.
- Is there a downside to partnering? It's possible that the Library identity was diluted by association with the other committees, but in both cases we were able to repeat the workshops on our own turf later on in the semester.

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Conclusion

A variety of techniques which take into account the busy schedules of teaching faculty is useful in creating successful drop-in workshops. LaGuardia faculty found the short, informal format particularly appealing. One faculty member wrote: “Quick but very helpful.” Our feedback sheets also revealed that faculty found sources for themselves during the workshops: “I found three articles on an old film I am researching” as well as skills to share with students: “now I can do this [search a database] w/ confidence with my students.” By keeping our planning process nimble we were able to align the workshops with the goals of the college and we achieved a new level of recognition through inclusion in the college’s strategic plan. Each institution will face different challenges and opportunities for conducting this kind of faculty outreach, but ultimately we found that these planning and marketing techniques were beneficial in helping us achieve both popular and critical success.

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“ If you don’t tell
your own story,
someone else will. ”

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