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# Behold The Power Of The Donut:
# A Successful Case Study Of A DE Library, Departmental, And Faculty & Student Collaborations

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Abstract

Creating and maintaining a successful library distance education program, even given ideal variables, can be a huge challenge. This article will discuss how the library distance program was planned, implemented, and evaluated in a three-year span. A staff of three–five librarians utilized organizational partnerships, grass-roots marketing and easy-to-use software to plan and implement the program. Key features of the plan will be discussed, including a books-by-mail system, interlibrary loan, online workshop creation, online streaming events, general distance learner engagement, and faculty inclusion. This case study is unique due to the accelerated development of the program, with success in less than three years, and the size of the online population served, approximately 15,000. Examples of unique collaborations with other university functions will also be shared, including career development, graduation, orientation, and touring.

## Introduction

The Full Sail Library is part of Full Sail University, a privately funded academic institution located in Winter Park, Florida. During the time of the study (2011–14) the library provided services for approximately 15,000 students, over 2,000 faculty and staff members, and 40 different degree programs. The library's main goal was to support the University's mission, "to provide students with an innovative style of education, delivered by a staff of dedicated individuals, that addresses the career opportunities available in an ever-growing, constantly evolving industry" (Full Sail University, 2015, para. 3). At the time of the study, the library employed one Director of Library Services, one Reference Librarian, one Catalog Specialist, two Library Technical Assistants and thirty student workers. Administration of the Full Sail Library fell under the University's governance, which states that the Director of Academic Advising (acting head of the library) reports to one of several University Vice

Presidents. All major library decisions come from upper-level management, including any budgetary and operations changes.

Prior to 2012, the library offered minimal resources to online students and faculty. The library hosted a Website with basic functionality that could be visited off campus, but that was the extent of online services. Using this Website students, faculty, and staff could remotely search research databases and the library catalog for information. The library did not offer common distance-learning resources such as library instruction, research assistance, or supplemental services. Although Full Sail launched its first online degree program, Entertainment Business Master's Degree, in 2007, there was not a library implementation plan in place for distance education until 2011. As the need and desire for online education options grew, the library team tasked itself with creating a wealth of library resources that could be accessed from off campus and re-marketing the library so that the online Full Sail community knew about the resources and how to use them.

## Literature review

The availability of education at a distance is not new—training videos, downloadable information, and public television, have been around for years (Wolpert, 1998). It was not until recently that academic institutions and their libraries began creating purposefully formalized distance education programs. With this burgeoning focus on distance education, academic libraries' role is to create services specifically tailored towards distance learners and in some cases re-marketing already existing services to appeal to distance learners (Summey, 2004).

A great deal of research on creating academic library distance education programs relates to the marketing of services. Distance education programs are not one size fits all, and the continued expansion of research provides guidance in unique areas. The marketing of libraries is not a new topic, and with the added area of marketing distance education services, a large, detailed body of work has been created in the past several years. Both areas of research, fortunately, continue to grow as the landscape of libraries and academia change. Much of the literature that exists focuses on branding, SWOT analysis methods (Summey, 2004) and market evaluation (Wolpert, 1998), including creating promotional videos to market services to students (Dalal, 2014). One resounding and fundamental point that reverberates throughout all the literature is the critical need to let students know about the services available. It matters little what distance education services exist if students do not know about them (Summey, 2004).

Just as important as the student services development are the faculty services for distance learning. Faculty members, after all, will be using the resources to engage with their students (Mair & Shrauger, 2014; Schrecker, 2006). Advertising and creating distance resources for university faculty and staff is similar to that of creating it for students. Surveys to university faculty indicate that the main obstacles include lack of information about services and an inability to stay on top of technology trends (Adams & Cassner, 2001).

Perhaps counter-intuitively, the expansion of the purpose of the physical academic library—from strictly a research center to operating also as a communal and social space—has relevance to distance learning. In the past, libraries served primarily as places of academic engagement and study (Gayton, 2008). Now, students expect their libraries to serve as a place of social engagement (Yoo-Lee, Lee, & Velez, 2013). Numerous studies have been conducted to demonstrate how newer generations are using library spaces, and how libraries can better serve the needs of these students. And these questions equally apply to distance learning: What role does the library play in fostering a community atmosphere to distance learners? How can the library help connect far-flung students?

The review above indicates that with a new focus on distance education, libraries have positioned themselves to develop plans and strategies that best service the varying needs of distance learners. Focusing on marketing and communal engagement are great starting points. It is easy to assume that in order to successfully accomplish these goals a distance education team will be dedicated to the cause with sufficient resources including budget, staffing, and guidance. This case study aims to prove that success can be accomplished with minimal resources, staffing, and funding. The article will also provide an example of the possibility to create a "library through community" space for distance students and what that space might look like.

## Background

In 2011, the goals of the library were to meet the needs of the existing curriculum (and of the more than 15,000 students, faculty and staff), to develop a process for making library resources and services relevant and to market the library to all students, faculty, and staff (both online and on campus). A quick assessment of the current collection revealed the following: a small print book collection, a couple hundred DVDs, and less than a dozen databases. There were no services in place for online students and past statistics revealed that the library was very rarely used. Also, the existing collection was not sufficient enough to support the curriculum, both on campus and online.

Major changes were quickly implemented to support the online students and faculty, which included: a Chat system to aid in reference questions, increasing the current collection, books/media-by-mail system, interlibrary loan (through a subscription to WorldCat), and online workshops/tutorials creation and implementation. Once the initial online services were in place, the library staff began to think about how to best market the new services and resources.

## Method

The goals were challenging with a library staff of five. In response to this challenge it was quickly realized that the library team would create and market a "library through community"; that is, all campus faculty, staff, and students would feel a sense of

ownership and community within the library. Further, the library would in a sense become reflective of the unique Full Sail culture and it would evolve to blend in, all the while providing the much-needed resources and services to successfully serve the departments. The most important objective was to gain buy-in through collaboration with teams across campus, including faculty, staff, and students from a variety of departments and backgrounds. It was believed that communal ownership and collaboration would support the overall goal of updating the library collection and space to 21st century standards.

The primary methods chosen to market the existing sources were electronic communication, in-person communication and student support. Details are as follows.

### Electronic communication

Most library communication was completed electronically through email or postings on the library Website. This included any operational information, library updates, workshop schedules and external or campus-wide news. The library created a blog and updated it at least once a week with collection and event news from both the library and the university. In addition, the library Website was changed to add many new pages and features. Before, the site consisted of one page with links to the databases. After the upgrade, the site has a separate database page, tutorials, "About the Library," additional resources, faculty requests and requests links. As of April 25, 2012, the FSO Website team stated that the library's Online Databases page was the number one most viewed page on the FSO site.

### In-person communication

The first plan to market the new resources was to send out emails and announcements through social media sites and the library Website. This was not as effective as we had hoped. It was clear that the departments were not going to come to the library … we had to go to them. The library staff's solution was to each week choose a specific department and "crash" their faculty cubicles and department head offices with donuts and a fifteen-minute speech about the "new library" with our "new services and resources." A small budget was procured for the express purpose to purchase donuts to take to the official departmental and cubicle meetings.

### Student support

The most successful aspect of the library's marketing plan was student support. Due to the small library professional staff of five, we quickly realized we were going to need help to get our message successfully delivered to the campus. At the time of the study, the library employed over 30 work-study students (both in person and online). Their responsibilities were primarily circulation duties and some basic reference. The library work-study students majored in Film, Recording Arts, Show Production, Game Art, Entertainment Business and Computer Animation

primarily. It was quickly discovered that they were a wealth of hard-working, social media-savvy, think-outside-of-the box creativity that could help make the library relevant. It was agreed to facilitate and encourage the students to work on video tutorials (database-specific as well as services-oriented), write on the blog, help lead library based events, and offer feedback for library focus groups all for "real world" experience. The projects they led/created had the following positive results: the students added projects to portfolios, received excellent reference letters from the library director, and their work was proudly displayed on the library Website and reported in both the library and university news channels.

By implementing collaborative methods that were virtually free (at most, they cost the library team in time), the library team was able to witness first-hand what was working in the marketing campaign and tweak approaches, course-correcting in real time. This ability to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community contributed greatly to the project's success. Two fundamental principles of this methodological approach were the importance of library availability to constituents and regular self-reflection on the degree of success in meeting community needs and fostering buy-in.

## Results

By implementing grassroots, collaborative marketing to the academic community, library services and collaboration improved across the board and expanded quickly. As the library staff proactively presented library services to one university team and news of our successes spread by word of mouth, the library would be invited to work with other areas. This rapidly expanding ripple effect allowed the library to become relevant to degrees and disciplines that hadn't previously considered the library a valuable resource.

### Instruction/promotion

The Director of Library Services began planning to attend monthly departmental meetings to ascertain the library collections needs and to inform departments of the materials and services offered. When no requests came from the emails, the staff resorted to the donut drop-in plan. This proved more successful than the series of unanswered emails that was the first attempt to reach out to the existing faculty and departments. Faculty were at first surprised, but were willing to offer advice and share requests about what kinds of resources the library should have to support their classes. Soon afterward, there were invitations to attend the departmental meetings and to participate in the Program Advisory Committee's annual tour. During these tours, committee members reviewed the library facilities, collection and credentials of the professional staff.

### Accreditation

It was announced in 2012 that the university was due for accreditation renewal, and would be evaluated campus-wide, including the library, by the accrediting

body The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC). Departments campus-wide were strongly encouraged to incorporate library services and resources within their classes as per requirements of the ACCSC policy. Through a series of social media announcements, emails, delivered donuts to departmental meetings, and one-page proposals sent out to the individual departments stating how the library can aid in meeting the needs of the accreditation standards, the library became more prevalent to the campus culture, both onsite and online. One of the more positive results was that the library became a part of the new student orientation and a requirement for on-campus and online faculty to attend a Counting Education workshop for faculty specific to resources and services.

In 2013, the accreditation report was distributed and it listed the library as one of the top three departments on campus. In three short years, thanks to a successful marketing plan, the library went from being one of the worst departments to one of the most efficient.

### Orientation/continuing education

The Full Sail orientation process is unique as there is a new student orientation offered every month. Each month provides a chance for the library to market the resources and services through a thirty- to sixty-minute orientation (both on campus and online). The orientation consisted of an overview of services and resources offered as well as short introduction to using the databases. It also served as way to market our monthly events and services to the students before they start classes. To further market services to faculty, monthly library resources workshops (in-person and online) were offered through the Continuing Education and Professional Development departments. The library staff would rotate teaching a two-hour workshop about the existing library resources. The workshop included: training and use of individual databases, such as *EBSCOhost* and *LexisNexis Academic*; searching the online catalog; faculty resources and services; tutorials on research; and searching for relevant materials to be used in special projects and papers.

### Library focus groups

In order to continue the momentum and success of the "library as community" marketing plan, an internal assessment and evaluation was the next step. The result was the formation of a campus wide library focus group and a specific library work-study focus group. The Directors of Academic Advising and Library Services implemented an annual focus group consisting of approximately 30 members who represented instructors, online students, on-campus students, administrative and library staff; the session lasted approximately one to two hours. The purpose of the group was to explore patron perceptions of the library and gather opinions on how to improve its space and services. The meeting took place in a conference room away from the library and the online members joined the meetings via GoToWebinar. Notes were taken from the meetings to be used to improve and create new practices and services.

A similar process was created for the formation of the library work-study focus group. Four work-study students with at least six months experience working in the library (both on campus and online) were selected to answer a series of open-ended questions and discussed a broad range of topics concerning library services and the library's collection. The results helped the library staff identify areas of improvement and to determine a structure for implementation. Both focus groups yielded positive feedback which led to a new and improved library Website, a library blog and a more structured process to host monthly library events.

### LibraryLive events

In addition to providing information sources and research assistance, the library staff encouraged the social aspect of life at Full Sail. This was the inspiration behind the series of *LibraryLive* events. The library hosted monthly social gatherings including "Feed the Students," movie nights, karaoke contests, gaming tournaments and other events that encourage students, faculty and staff to come together outside of the classroom. The events were led by students and facilitated by the library staff. In order for a student to host a *LibraryLive* event, they need to submit a proposal to the library staff, attend a meeting to "pitch" their idea, and be in charge of running the event. The library provided the space, resources, food, and help if needed while the students led and facilitated the event. It was a great opportunity for everyone. As the students gained experience, the library increased door counts and other statistics (and the staff didn't have to come up with the ideas); and the students, both online and on-campus, felt an ownership over the library.

"Feed the Students" was the most popular as each month a different department on campus would sponsor the event by donating canned goods and food for the students. The food would be set up in the library for the students and the library staff would be available to answer any questions or offer assistance for research. It was a very successful way to increase the door counts and to show the students the new library and all of the resources available to them.

Other events specifically marketed to the online students included open mike nights and karaoke contests via GoToWebinar. Online students were able to participate by streaming video through the GoToWebinar system. Statistics showed that the online student focused events had more attendance (virtually) than on campus. The students were excited to be a part of the event, especially having the ability for the on-campus and online students to "see" each other via strategically placed projectors and screens. The overwhelming success of the library events increased the relevancy of the library and opened doors to campus departmental collaborations.

### Departmental collaborations

In order to successfully cement the "library as community" plan to the rest of campus, the library felt that establishing collaborative partnerships and outreach within other departments on campus was vital. As word of mouth, blog posts, and social

media blasts, the library was getting the reputation as the place to be. By simply offering space, resources and available students, the library formed partnerships with The Writing Center, Career Development, and the Graduation Launch departments.

Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., the Writing Center assisted students with writing issues in the library. The library staff set aside a main desk, free printing services for Writing Center staff, and a special collection shelf of writing-based resources especially to assist the members of the writing center. The purpose was to create a Writing Center centric space for easy access to writing center resources and staff.

In addition, one afternoon a week, members of the Career Development team set up a table in the library to meet with students who may or may not have an appointment to discuss their future goals in the industry. The library staff offered space and free printing services to the Career Development team to assist with their departmental outreach.

Graduate Launch is the orientation for graduation, as it helps to ensure that the expected graduates reach graduate status. The graduate launch is mandatory even if the student does not plan on attending graduation. Graduation Launch was scheduled once a month in the library from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Representatives from the Business Office, Student Advising, Career Development, and Graduation vendors set up tables to meet with the students during this event. Online students also participated through FaceTime, GoToMeeting and the video option of the AOL chat when the other departments were visiting the library.

By 2014, the library was recognized and praised by many major campus departments. It was recognized that the library team had built a host of library resources that reflected student, faculty, and staff needs. Based on anecdotal feedback from academic meetings and satisfaction surveys, the campus community appreciated that their needs were considered during marketing efforts and focus groups and continued to seek out opportunities for supporting the library team.


## Conclusion

Before 2011, the library was seen as simply a building with books. Thanks to a successful marketing plan the perception changed to a place that provides an abundance of resources to faculty, staff, and students, especially those working away from campus. Thus, the case study was deemed an immense success based on student and faculty feedback and demonstrated by an increase in use.

Additionally, the study was not only successful with enhancing the existing materials and services provided to both campus and online students, but perhaps even more importantly inspiring change and enhancing the library over time. Through the course of the study, library staff was able to lay solid groundwork upon which future gains and outreach will be built. By partnering with such a large number of campus communities, the library became a highly sought-after campus community partner and event host. Moreover, the library's traditional offerings and print collection grew substantially, all of which are now available and marketed towards

distance education students. Relatedly, the online collection also grew and survey results revealed distance learners felt more comfortable navigating the collection. Through marketing and outreach, the library is now seen as a resource that not only considers distance learning, but tailors services to the unique needs of this community. Our primary goal—to help distance learners feel like a legitimate and equal part of the greater Full Sail Community—was thus achieved.

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