

Reaching out to future users: K-12 outreach at Kansas State Libraries

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Abstract:

Academic libraries have historically engaged in outreach within their own scholarly communities-to faculty, students, departments, and organizations on their campuses. Working with these groups remains a key function of college and university libraries, but it is increasingly important that we, as academic librarians, seek opportunities for partnerships with institutions and groups engaged in learning beyond the boundaries of our own campuses.

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REACHING OUT TO FUTURE USERS: K–12 OUTREACH AT KANSAS STATE LIBRARIES

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INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have historically engaged in outreach within their own scholarly communities—to faculty, students, departments, and organizations on their campuses. Working with these groups remains a key function of college and university libraries, but it is increasingly important that we, as academic librarians, seek opportunities for partnerships with institutions and groups engaged in learning beyond the boundaries of our own campuses.

Miranda Bennett (2007), in an article exploring the intersections between the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) strategic plan and the 2006 report “A Test of Leadership,” commonly known as the Spellings report, outlines several areas of opportunity for academic librarians. One such area is K–12 education. Bennett refers to “the need for members of the higher education community to work together with K–12 educators to ensure that students are well prepared for the challenges of postsecondary life and aware of the opportunities available to them.” Bennett suggests that librarians at college and university libraries can meet this need by “creating outreach programs to the K–12 community” (Bennett 2007, 371). She recommends working with K–12 teachers and library media specialists (LMS), hosting high school groups for instruction and introducing them to the world of academic libraries and developing outreach initiatives to increase overall community awareness of higher education.

Bennett’s words are likely to resonate with the many academic librarians already committed to working with students from local communities. As coordinators of K–12 outreach at Kansas State University (K-State) Libraries, we strive to meet the needs of the high school students that feature so prominently in Bennett’s

argument, while also seeking opportunities to introduce younger students to our resources. This chapter outlines our comprehensive K–12 outreach program, covering its history and place within our mission and vision, and also provides tips for starting or developing such a program in your library.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature indicates that academic librarians have long been interested and engaged in outreach to K–12 communities. Many of these librarians are employed by public universities similar to K-State, which is a land grant institution. As such, these libraries have a clear charge to serve their local communities in addition to the academic community. The University of Nebraska, for instance, established a program for high school users in the late 1980s and has maintained a structured relationship with area high school groups since. Their program, which is housed in the circulation department and focuses on providing access to physical materials, is closely tied to the university's land grant status. The authors write that the University Libraries "take this land-grant mission seriously, serving as a state-wide resource and making the research collection available throughout the state to Nebraska citizens" (Pearson and McNeil 2002, 24). Librarians from private schools, including prominent institutions like Yale University, have also been active in K–12 outreach, even without the same mission to serve users beyond their academic communities (Young 2007).

Although the emphasis varies from institution to institution, the following reasons for working with K–12 students in an academic library setting are frequently mentioned:

- decreasing the anxiety experienced by students by providing them with a basic introduction to academic libraries before they enter the university environment
- marketing the university to prospective students
- introducing key information literacy concepts earlier in the educational process, both indirectly, by working with LMS, and directly, by providing instruction to students
- supplementing resources available at school and public libraries
- exposing younger students to the higher education environment, which relates closely to the marketing function of this outreach (Burhanna and Jensen 2006; Jackson and Hansen 2006; Kunda 2007; Pearson and McNeil 2002).

Much of the literature refers specifically to working with high school students, but the same goals also apply to younger groups who might visit an academic library. Several authors speak to the importance of outreach to elementary and middle school students in addition to high school visitors, focusing in some cases on unique opportunities to collaborate with K–12 educators and LMS, such as National History Day (Manuel 2005). Sue Kunda speaks more broadly of the benefits of working with a wide range of students, writing, "There is a growing acceptance of a seamless K–16 educational system, compelling educators who rarely dealt with one another in the past to work together now and in the future" (Kunda 2007, 25). Her words relate closely to Bennett's, challenging librarians to expand the scope of our educational services beyond our own students, faculty, and staff, to

include students as young as five. Working with students before they even reach high school can instill information literacy concepts early in life, ideally contributing to future academic success. Timothy G. Young from Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library writes in support of outreach, particularly to younger children. He advocates working with these children to introduce the research library early in their lives. This exposure to the research library ultimately decreases library anxiety and "demystifies the institution by placing it in context of what libraries, in general, do" (Young 2007, 235).

The literature also refers to the rewards of working with K-12 users beyond the larger goals mentioned above. As Kunda writes, "The enthusiasm of younger students is a welcome relief from the oftentimes blasé attitude of college students" (Kunda 2007, 25). The unique rewards of working with K-12 students, as well as the larger goals outlined in the literature, have shaped and inspired our program at K-State Libraries.

K-12 OUTREACH AND OUR MISSION

As a land grant institution, K-State has a strong tradition of outreach to the citizens of the state of Kansas. K-State's current mission, adopted in 1991, includes "enriching the lives of the citizens of Kansas by extending to them opportunities to engage in life-long learning and to benefit from the results of research" (Kansas State University 1991). K-State Libraries, though an integral part of the University community, had little formal involvement in many of these enrichment activities before the early 2000s.

Since then, K-State Libraries have become increasingly committed to outreach, particularly to the K-12 community, which supports the University's mission by providing unique learning opportunities to K-12 students. K-12 outreach also supports the libraries' new strategic plan, which explicitly refers to the K-12 community as a user group. The plan indicates a strong commitment to outreach, with one of its goals reading, "We will strengthen our outreach activities to ensure users know how the Libraries can and do serve them" (K-State Libraries 2006).

The feeder schools for K-State vary from well-funded suburban schools to rural and urban schools with smaller and sometimes underfunded libraries. K-State also has a small but significant contingent of students who were home schooled and thus relied on the resources available at their local public libraries. Some of these libraries, both school and public, still maintain card catalogs, and many have limited print and online resources. As a result, many undergraduates who attend K-State begin their university careers with little or no exposure to the information resources available to them through libraries. K-State Libraries offer services to K-12 students to uphold the mission of our university and libraries—giving back to the local community by teaching information literacy skills, by promoting lifelong learning, and by welcoming students to the K-State community with the hope that they will consider us when they select an institution of higher learning.

HISTORY OF LIBRARY INSTRUCTION AT K-STATE LIBRARIES

In the 1970s and early 1980s, K-State Libraries had an instruction librarian whose position focused primarily on providing basic research skills classes. In the

mid-1980s these classes were incorporated into large introductory courses for undergraduates, such as Public Speaking and Expository Writing. At that time, the position was converted to a reference position. This left the libraries without a formal instruction program, with the bulk of student instruction being provided by subject librarians.

The expansion of our K–12 outreach program occurred in conjunction with the formal establishment of the Library Instruction Unit. Beginning in the late 1990s, K-State Libraries experienced a growing demand for library instruction for general education courses on campus. At that time, there was no official librarian or program in place to meet these needs. Responding to the increasing number of requests, the libraries created the Patron Instruction Team in 2001. This team was small, with just five staff members, only one of whom was a full-time librarian, and none of whom were solely devoted to instruction. The unit concentrated on offering basic drop-in instruction classes and supplemented those with a variety of online tutorials and modules. With all the work required to get the program off the ground and to meet the needs of campus users, the small unit was unable to provide formal outreach to K–12 groups. It was decided that the libraries would offer services to high school groups, although the staff typically only had time to do brief tours of our main library, Hale, and basic instruction on the use of reference resources and online databases.

In 2004 the Libraries hired a resident librarian whose responsibilities were primarily instruction-related. With the help of this resident, the Patron Instruction Team was able to expand its services to the K–12 community. In 2005 an instruction coordinator was hired, and the Library Instruction Unit was created to meet the rising information literacy needs of students on campus. A new resident librarian took responsibility for K–12 tours and instruction, increasing the visibility of these services in our local community and beyond.

CURRENT PROGRAM

Since 2001, when the Patron Instruction Team was formed and the Libraries began to offer more formalized tours and instruction for K–12 groups, the demand for these services has increased markedly.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of K–12 Students</i>
2001	69
2002	60
2003	0/No data
2004	0/No data
2005	228
2006	366
2007	479

Prior to 2005 we offered tours and basic instruction for high school (and some middle school) groups, but we did not advertise our services widely. Once we began advertising on our website and on email lists, we saw a sharp increase in demand.

Particularly for those schools in surrounding counties, K-State Libraries are an unparalleled resource, and teachers and LMS express appreciation for the opportunity for their students to make use of our print materials and electronic resources. Although Kansas does offer statewide access to a group of databases to anyone with a Kansas Library Card, the wider range of scholarly article databases available at K-State Libraries can be a major asset to students looking to supplement their research. Even those visitors who do not come to the Libraries for research benefit from an introduction to a large academic library, and younger students particularly find our main library, with five floors, 200 computers, and nearly two million volumes, an exciting place to visit.

We currently provide two basic types of services to our K–12 users: instruction for older groups and story time activities for younger groups. All groups also receive a basic tour of Hale Library, which is especially important for older students who might be exploring the building on their own to find materials.

STARTING A K-12 OUTREACH PROGRAM AT YOUR LIBRARY

If you are interested in starting a program like ours at your own library, there are a number of things to consider as you begin to make your plans. Perhaps the most important question to answer is who will be responsible for the program. Although we have assumed coordinator roles for this program in our own library, K–12 outreach is not an official part of our job descriptions. In your institution you may consider taking a different approach and formally associating this responsibility with a position or positions. You do not want K–12 outreach responsibilities to be passed around each time staffing and job duties change because the service could easily fall through the cracks.

Another critical question to ask is where K–12 outreach best fits in your organizational structure. A primary advantage of the service having a clear home unit or department is that it will be easier for your colleagues and your users to identify you. Our K–12 program lives in the Library Instruction Unit, although the contact person responsibilities have changed hands several times. The literature on K–12 outreach indicates that academic libraries have chosen to centralize their outreach programs in a variety of departmental areas, including circulation and other public services areas (Burhanna and Jensen 2006; Pearson and McNeil 2002). Other good homes for this program may be through a community service or outreach librarian.

There are a number of other things to consider as you develop your program. Do you have

- space for students to work and keep their belongings?
- time to work with them?
- money—will librarians be paid extra or will this be added to “duties as assigned”?
- buy-in from your administration and colleagues?
- an environment appropriate for the age group?
- enough physical resources, such as computers, copiers, and classrooms, to share with people not affiliated with your institution?
- the facilities to keep their presence from distracting or annoying your primary users and to keep your primary users from intimidating or distracting visitors?

We offer services to students from kindergarten through twelfth grade, but that range may not be appropriate for your library. If your library is small, if resources are scarce, or if your collections are especially valuable, you may prefer to limit access to older children who may be more responsible and better able to comport themselves. Also keep in mind that, in working with large groups, it may be hard to keep younger students quiet. If noise is a concern, keep age in mind.

We welcome students from all over Kansas. If you live in a more densely populated area or simply need to set parameters for your program, you may wish to focus your outreach to specific school districts. Your admissions office can usually advise you on the primary feeder schools for your institution.

PROMOTING YOUR PROGRAM

Once you have made the decision and received approval to start your program, you will need to get the word out so that local K–12 groups know what services you have available. Here are a few simple ways to promote your new program:

- Advertise on your library and university websites.
- Contact the schools and home school groups directly.
- Announce the service on email lists.
- Provide your local public librarians with information about the service.

One of the easiest ways to get the word out about your program is to make sure that there is information on your library website. If people do not see explicit text that tells them they are welcome on your campus and in your library, they may assume that they are not. In addition, it is important to make sure that campus and library staff members know that this service is available so that they do not unknowingly turn people away. As noted earlier, we have had success providing information on our library website, including our direct contact information and a form that teachers and LMS can easily submit in advance of a visit (<http://www.lib.k-state.edu/depts/libinst/highschool.html>). We also collaborate with New Student Services at our university, because they frequently field requests for campus tours as field trips for K–12 students. Along with the bug zoo and the campus dairy bar, Hale Library is a popular spot (<http://consider.k-state.edu/grouptours>).

It is also a good idea to contact schools directly. This can be done by sending out brochures to principals, teachers, and LMS, posting information in newsletters, and sending out emails via an email list. With knowledge of the program, teachers can plan ahead and work a visit into their course planning. When you are sending out information, do not forget private schools and home schoolers. These two groups may not have the same information resources that a public school does and might particularly appreciate the invitation.

Last but not least, let other libraries know. Teachers, librarians, and parents use libraries too and may not know that the local college or university library allows people not affiliated with the school in their library.

When your program has been approved and advertised, the next step is to get volunteers. Even if you think you can do it all on your own, it is a good idea to ask your colleagues if they are interested in helping out. This will help ease the burden

when you get a large class of precocious elementary students or a group of high schoolers with lots of questions. You may have colleagues who have experience—professional or personal—and can share techniques on how to work with these students. It can also foster a sense of community among people in your organization who are committed to working with potential future users. In addition, working with K–12 groups can be fun! Even if you do not like working with them full time, it can be refreshing to work with people who are enthusiastic about your resources, the size of your building, or just being on a college campus.

ORGANIZING AND PLANNING K–12 VISITS

When planning a visit, there are some vital bits of information that you will need from the teacher or LMS requesting the tour or instruction:

- Phone or email contact
- Number of students and adults
- Information needs and type of assignment

It is a good idea to confirm the visit one week in advance and to ask if any changes have been made to the assignment. Keep in mind that teachers have busy schedules and may be difficult to get in touch with. If possible, do not save any key communication for the last minute.

For some, grades five through seven (ten to thirteen years old) may not seem that different from one another but, in our experience, this is a time of transition for students during which they trade in Disney Channel and dolls/action figures for Facebook.com and iPods. It can be difficult to decide what is appropriate for what age. For that reason, we divide our activities into tours/story time and tours/instruction.

Tours

Tours are provided for all K–12 groups, though the length and focus may vary. Giving tours is a great way to introduce information literacy and critical thinking skills into the visit. The American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (1998) published “Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning,” which might inspire you to develop activities or questions that integrate information literacy concepts into the tour. The standards focus on developing the potential of students to be independent learners and to pursue knowledge of all kinds.

At K-State Libraries we try to keep these guidelines in mind while also considering what kinds of questions might keep students of different ages engaged and interested during the tour. Questions that have worked well for us include:

- How many books are in the library? Why do you think we have so many books? Should we get more? Why should/n’t we get more?
- This is the science section. What are some types of sciences? What are some types of jobs that involved science? Why do we need science?

The most popular parts of the tour in Hale Library are the compact shelving, our murals, the DOW Chemical Multicultural Resource Center, and Special Collections/Archives.

- Compact shelving questions include: Why do we have moving shelves? Can they hurt you? Can they crush your teacher?
- Murals—The “We Are The Dream” Mural, depicting the minority experience in the United States, was created, painted, and partially funded by KSU students in the late 1970s. Four murals representing K-State’s original colleges hang in our Great Room. Questions include: Who is in the pictures? What are they doing? Why are they doing it? Why was a mural painted about it?
- DOW Chemical Multicultural Resource Center questions include: Do you know what culture is? Can you give us an example of something unique from your culture?
- Special Collections/Archives—Our archivist and special collections staff select materials that will interest younger students, including items that they can touch. Questions include: How old is this? Why is it important? Why do we keep this?

Story Time

For younger children, generally those in first through sixth grades, we often choose to provide a library tour paired with a story time activity. We do this for several reasons. Students at this age generally have shorter attention spans and plenty of energy. It may be in the best interests of the students and the library users to keep the little ones on the move. Another reason we prefer to keep the activities limited to a tour and/or story time is that we may not have any materials that are appropriate for their reading level. Even if your library has a juvenile literature collection like ours does, it may not have enough nonfiction to support their research project.

Before your first tour, it is important to decide on the “rules” of your library. One of those rules may be what you wish to be called. In academia, we often address each other by our first names, but many younger students are used to calling people Mrs., Miss, Ms., Mr., so that is an appropriate way to introduce yourself. If this is more formal than you are comfortable with, Ms. Tara or Mr. Dan works fine too. Most likely the teachers and other adults accompanying the students have already asked them to be on their best behavior and told them what to do and not do. You might want to ask the children if they know what the library rules are—they may have been given more rules than you expect. Some obvious rules that we have in our library tours and story times for younger students are that students need to raise their hands, stick with a buddy, and whisper. Some K-State librarians also have rules that children have to tip-toe through the quiet areas, sit on the floor until it is their turn to use the restroom, or cover their mouths as they walk up stairs. Little kids (and even their teachers) may think the rules are silly or funny, but they will go along with it if you do it too. We have found that these rules, while sometimes silly, help to keep the students’ attention while keeping noise and disruption to a minimum.

Instruction

More structured instruction activities, such as catalog and database searching demonstrations, are generally reserved for middle and high school students, though

we have had gifted classes of fourth to sixth graders request instruction as well. The way you introduce your library to the younger children will probably be the same way you will want to introduce it to the older students. But when more in-depth instruction is involved, more preparation is necessary. If possible, find out what resources the students can access at their library and what type of format (books, microforms, etc.) the teacher would like them to use. Many times, high school students prefer print materials over on-line databases. This may be because they are more familiar with books, or because books have the more general information that they are seeking, or because this is their first time in a large library and they want to take advantage of all the books available. If this is the case with your group of students, make sure the teachers know about circulation privileges for community users in advance so that there are no surprises or disappointments at the end of the day. Being as familiar as possible with the rules at your institution is an asset, so find out the following information before working with a group of students looking to check out books: whether non-university users can check out materials, how much it costs, and how many books can they check out at a time? If teachers are going to check out books for students, let the students know the consequences of damaging or losing materials. If the teacher plans to check out materials for the class, he or she may have already warned them about this, but it does not hurt for them to hear the information twice.

If given enough advance notice about the class and their assignment, it may be helpful to create a handout for the students. We also create online resources pages that outline a combination of resources: those they can access only on campus and those they can access from home, school, or a local public library.

Because many college students do not understand that databases and ejournals, while online, are not free, high school students are not likely to understand either. You may need to explain this to them. Remind them that because things are subscription based they will not be able to save the URL and access the article from home. They will need to print or save materials before they leave the library. It may be useful to suggest to teachers in advance that students bring flash drives, if possible. We encourage students to save articles or email them as attachments to an email account they can access.

Behavior and Teacher Participation

Needless to say, good teacher-librarian communication is essential to make any visit successful. For this reason, it is vital for both parties to express their expectations clearly before the class arrives at your library. These expectations should include behavior guidelines as well as content and structure of the visit. We would love to tell you that students are always well behaved, but, unfortunately, that is not always the case. Much like working with college students, you may experience students not participating, goofing off, or perhaps even fighting. If you find that things are not going well after the class has arrived, there are a few things you can do. Treat these students the same way you would college students who have gotten out of hand. If students are too loud, ask them to be quiet. If your library does not allow food, ask them to put or throw the food away. If your suggestions are not effective or you do not feel comfortable doing this, ask for support from the

teacher. It is always best to let the teacher know how things are going, especially if you think there are problems. Most likely, a few words from their teacher will be the reminder the students need. On rare occasions, you may feel that the teachers or adults with the class are not contributing and you may need to take charge of the situation. If students are misbehaving and teachers are doing little to support you, pull the teacher aside and let them know that you will not be able to help the students if they do not behave in the library.

Regardless of the outcome of the class visit, let the teacher know formally how smoothly you felt the visit went. Because many teachers keep a portfolio of their activities and accomplishments, we like to send thank you notes on official letterhead to both the teachers and their school principals. We thank the class for their visit and comment on our perceptions of its success. We have not yet had to send a note with bad news, and we hope that we will never need to, but this is one way of letting someone in authority know the outcome.

Concerns

Although we would like to say working with K–12 is sunshine and roses, that is not always the case. Because academic libraries are so familiar to us, we can easily forget that our libraries are adult environments and things are not generally geared toward young people. The design of your library is likely to be more open and users will primarily be aged seventeen and older. With that said, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Field trips are an adventure for K–12 students, and as is the case with many adventures, people can actually get lost. Luckily, we have not lost any children, but high school kids have mysteriously “disappeared” in the stacks, and students of all ages are apprehensive about striking out on their own in such a large building. Be sure to point out all the exits and the places to get help before, during, and near the end of your tour or instruction session. Establish a meeting place for them in case someone gets separated. It is also a good idea to let your library staff know in advance that you are working with a school group. If a staff member notices confused children walking around the building, they can be sent your way.

Teachers or parents may prefer that their child not be introduced to certain issues. There may be demonstrations on campus in the free speech zone that cover topics that are new, offensive, or inappropriate for younger people. We have had campus tours and visits coincide with a celebration of National Coming Out Day, with student groups that were handing out condoms, and with abortion protests (complete with graphic images). It is not always possible to anticipate these activities, so it is helpful to let teachers and LMS know that there is a possibility they will witness these events. Teachers should be aware that academic libraries and their resources are aimed at an adult audience before they bring their students. Public Internet access computers are unlikely to have filters. There is always the possibility that K–12 students will accidentally or actively access inappropriate subject matter. Or, like many college students, they may spend a good portion of their time on social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace. You will want to emphasize that their visit to your library is a special occasion so that they are more likely to take advantage of the visit and stay on task. Your collection may also contain

materials not suitable for young eyes. Many academic libraries have Playboy, nude art books, and radical or controversial books and authors. If this is a concern, it is best to let the teachers know so they can steer students away from these materials. We are careful to emphasize this and other issues that may arise on our Web page detailing our K-12 services.

Feedback

Finally, you may want to consider ways in which to receive feedback on your K-12 activities. We have done little to assess our program formally, but we frequently receive thank you letters and emails from teachers and students who have visited Hale Library. More formal assessment could include surveys mailed or emailed to participating schools, students, and teachers or linked from your library website.

CONCLUSION

The literature clearly indicates the advantages of providing K-12 services in academic libraries. Although our program and our activities are unique to K-State, the lessons we have learned can be easily applied in other academic library settings. Looking back to Miranda Bennett's arguments with which we opened this discussion, we have found that working with K-12 groups is a good way to prepare incoming students for the challenging academic world of higher education. We also agree that K-12 outreach can be an excellent promotional tool, and we make every attempt during our work with these students to point out the many services the library provides to the K-State community.

Although we have a solid start with our program, it is still in its early stages and we have plans to experiment with ways to improve our services. For instance, we would like to find effective ways to do more outreach to home-schooled students and their families. We would also like to develop strategies for working with teachers who would like to bring students in for an introduction to our academic environment but who do not choose assignments that fit the scope of our resources. In the future, we hope that our program continues to grow and that we are able to establish lasting partnerships with schools, teachers, and LMS.

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