

Session: "Reaching Out & Bringing In: Understanding & Encouraging Diversity in the Library"  
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Intersecting Paths & Building Relationships: Outreach Programming for  
Underrepresented Students in Architecture & Urban Planning  
Presenter: Meredith Kahn

Good afternoon, everyone. Today I'll be talking about a new outreach program in our library which aims to improve services to underrepresented students in the College of Architecture & Urban Planning, as well as provide new services to the student body as a whole. I'll be reviewing how we got this program off the ground and running, and hopefully provide you with useful tips for creating similar (and successful!) programming at your own institution.

The program itself is branded as "AAEL@TCAUP," AAEL being the acronym and common nickname for the Art, Architecture & Engineering Library and TCAUP being the acronym for the Taubman College of Architecture & Urban Planning. The program is composed of two major and interrelated components:

1. weekly office hours held in the Art & Architecture Building, home to the college
2. and collaborative work with a student group, NOMAS--the student chapter of the National Organization for Minority Architects

Brief review of acronyms:

AAEL = the library

TCAUP = the college

NOMAS = the student group

I should also note that the Art & Architecture building is located across the street from the library--about a 2-3 minute walk separates the two buildings. The library's collections serve not only the art and architecture students and faculty, but also the UM College of Engineering. The College of Engineering has an enrollment approximately seven times the size of art & design and architecture & urban planning combined. Because of this, the art and architecture students sometimes feel (we think) overwhelmed by the engineers--who, by their sheer number, tend to dominate not only the library's space, but also tend to dictate what happens in our building. (For example, we no longer have Macs widely available in our library because engineers--the primary users of the building--don't use them.) Until about 10 years ago, the art and architecture library was located in the art & architecture building across the street. Though no students remember that time, their professors do, and there is a continuing need to reach out and 'invite' them to the library.

The initial idea for this program emerged in the fall of 2007, in conversation with my colleagues Annette Haines and Rebecca Price, fellow art and architecture librarians at the University of Michigan. We began by reviewing the literature for ideas about outreach services to underrepresented students. One idea in particular stood out as potentially successful for us: partnering with a student group to offer services. We felt this approach could yield several potential benefits:

1. allow for the possibility of interacting with students outside of the library and classroom, and therefore in spaces in which they might feel more comfortable asking questions and seeking help
2. encourage the creation of effective relationships with students in which they begin to see librarians as partners in their academic success and as people they can trust and approach for help
3. potential to institutionalize the service by having the demand for it come from the students themselves rather than being imposed upon them by the library
4. allow students to self-identify as under-represented via their membership in a student group

We also identified the idea of holding office hours in the college as potentially successful because it would:

1. allow us to establish a visible presence in the students' space
2. allow us to reach a potentially new set of users who might be less likely to approach us in the library

After reviewing the literature, we worked on identifying services that students would be likely to make use of. We began by conducting in-depth interviews (typically 45-60 minutes) with students who had been identified by the college and recommended to us. These students were both undergraduates and graduates, and held leadership positions such as president of a student group, student representatives on faculty committees, and members of student government for the college. Nearly all of these students also self-identified as underrepresented, with many of them being students of color.

In the interviews, we asked students to reflect on their own information literacy and research skills, what they do when they need help, their perceptions of the library's services and collections, and their ideas for how we could serve them better. All of the students we interviewed provided answers that demonstrated that they had obviously thought about these questions on their own, and they were able to identify several problems we already knew about (for example, getting professors to place material on reserves) and a few we hadn't expected (a desire for Rebecca Price to have an office in the Art & Arch building). Overall, the data we gathered was incredibly useful, and provided a picture of how our students approach the research process and their views of the library.

The results of our interviews allowed us to design a brief survey that was distributed to ALL TCAUP students via email. We asked students several questions about how they use the library and conduct research, and the survey results were similar to the interview results.

Questions included:

1. how often do you visit the library (more than half of respondents visit the library at least once a week, and over 35% visit AAEL multiple times per week)
2. how often they use electronic resources like JSTOR, the Avery Index, LexisNexis, etc.
3. what they do FIRST when they need material for a paper or project, and what their most SUCCESSFUL strategy is for finding such material
4. what research skills they would like to learn more about (popular answers included finding spatial and demographic data, finding images, and tips for more effective searching)

5. how they would like to learn these skills (popular answers included handouts, online tutorials or guides, and office hours in their building)
6. and how they would like to be notified of new library services (students expressed a strong desire for emails and fliers, and a strong preference against a blog, Facebook group, or public Google calendar)

Based on the data we gathered in interviews and surveys and our previous lit review, we decided on offering the following services:

1. regular office hours staffed by librarians in the Art & Architecture Building
2. instruction sessions offered to NOMAS members during their regular meetings

Let me address the office hours portion of the project first.

We began holding office hours in early October 2008 outside the Media Center, which is a central location for all students in the art & architecture building--it's where they can buy supplies, coffee, pizza, and print large format or color documents. The initial response from students and faculty was positive. Given the results of our previous survey, we used posters and emails to publicize the service. Though numbers were initially low, the quality of questions was quite good. Rather than simple directional or factual questions, many of our interactions with students involved in-depth, complex questions--often requiring 20 minutes or more. Our statistics for the first semester of the program are qualitatively different than the questions our colleagues were answering on the reference desk at the library.

Office Hours vs. Reference Desk, Fall Semester:

directional = 2% OH; 33% RD

quick = 32% OH; 47% RD

research = 64% OH; 13% RD

referral = 2% OH; 8% RD

Office Hours vs. Reference Desk, Winter Semester:

directional = 8% OH; 28% RD

quick = 47% OH; 51% RD

research = 43% OH; 13% RD

referral = 2% OH; 8% RD

Midway through the year we used a brief survey to solicit feedback on the office hours program. 100% of students who reported they had visited office hours rated their experience as "good" or "excellent," and over 90% of respondents indicated an interest in visiting us again. For students who reported they had not visited our office hours, a majority indicated that they did not have questions for a librarian. Unfortunately, we also had a number of students indicate that they weren't aware of the program. In the future, we will have to revisit our marketing and promotion techniques to address this.

Overall, the office hours program was very successful. We had a number of students visit us repeatedly, and anecdotal evidence indicates that students and faculty were extremely satisfied with the program. Speaking for myself, I can say that the most meaningful part of this

experience was getting to interact with students so closely, getting to know them on a personal level. In addition, the questions were often interesting, challenging, and a pleasure to tackle.

Now I'd like to provide a brief overview of the other part of our outreach program--our partnership with the student chapter of the National Organization for Minority Architects.

A few of our initial interview subjects were members of the executive board of NOMAS, and they were excited to be involved in our outreach work from the beginning. When we began holding office hours in October, we also contacted the executive board to let them know that we would be interested in working with NOMAS. In November, I attended one of their regularly scheduled executive board meetings to discuss how librarians could work with NOMAS to improve services to underrepresented students in the college. I also gave them library brochures, pens, and post-it notes to distribute to their members. The board decided that having Rebecca Price attend an upcoming membership meeting would be appropriate, and a few weeks later Rebecca was asked to give a brief, 20-minute presentation on the library to NOMAS members. Students had numerous questions, and she gave a longer and more detailed presentation than originally anticipated. In March, Rebecca and I attended another NOMAS membership meeting, and gave a 45-minute presentation on the Avery Index, JSTOR, image resources such as ARTstor, AP Images, and the University of Michigan's own digital image collections. Several NOMAS members also visited us during our office hours, effectively connecting the two pieces of this outreach program. As with the office hours project, our outreach to NOMAS allowed us to get to know students and their research needs on a deeper level.

Now that I've given you a brief overview of what we accomplished, I'd like to discuss how you can create successful outreach programming at your own institution.

The lessons we learned can be summarized with three P's: PARTNERSHIP, PATIENCE, AND PERSISTENCE.

#### Partnership:

In order to create programming that students would actually make use of, we worked with staff, students, and faculty from the very beginning, seeking their knowledge about what was needed and how we could meet those needs. At your own institution, this partnership could include working with student services offices, multicultural student groups, other librarians, staff members, and faculty. Though working with such a varied group of stakeholders can be daunting, you will likely discover that you have shared goals. For example, early in our efforts we discovered that TCAUP had instituted a Diversity Taskforce, and we lobbied for the library having a voice in their efforts. In addition, we easily secured the support of our library director for our efforts because the library as a whole was in the process of encouraging new outreach programming. And our survey data proved useful to fellow librarians needing information about user populations and their behavior.

#### Patience:

Working closely with students was both the most rewarding and challenging aspect of this project. Our student partners would often express unqualified support and excitement for the ideas we presented to them, but they were also slow to provide requested feedback. Emails often

went unanswered and meetings were missed. Despite creating what seemed like a realistic timeline at the beginning of the project, everything took longer than anticipated. Any new service requires "care and feeding" at the beginning, and you should be prepared to wait a bit before you see results. When we first began holding office hours in the Art & Architecture building, our statistics were quite low, but as students got used to our presence there and word of the program spread, our numbers improved. In our second semester of providing office hours, we answered twice as many questions.

#### Persistence:

The need for patience naturally leads to a need for persistence. Didn't get a response to that email? Don't be afraid to send another one. A student or a staff member fails to show up for a meeting you set up? Don't get angry--move on and reschedule it. Have to change your plans for marketing and promotion due to lack of funds for professional printing? Investigate what resources you might have in-house. These are all examples of challenges we faced early in the program, and things you will likely encounter at your own institution. Be prepared for little failures, but be ready to step back and examine the big picture.

I hope this brief overview of what we've done has given you ideas for creating similar programming at your own institution. The text of my remarks (and a thorough bibliography) will be available after the conference. Please feel free to contact Rebecca or me if you have any questions. Also I'd like to thank the College of Architecture & Urban Planning for providing all of the images you've seen today. Thank you!