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Library Advocacy at a Liberal Arts College via a Library Advancement Coordinator

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Librarians or staff dedicated to advancing the library's public relations and fundraising efforts are common in academic research libraries across the country, where the library often works with central advancement and development offices to promote and benefit both the library and the institution as a whole. At smaller college libraries, however, these responsibilities often come under the purview of the director, if there is the time and opportunity to focus on them very much at all.

Seeking leadership development and an expanded skill set, in 2007 I met with Lewis & Clark's Watzek Library Director Jim Kopp to discuss new responsibilities and possible directions for my career. As was his administrative style, Jim was thoughtful and considerate in his approach, and over the course of many weeks we discussed my interests and strengths and reflected on current and future needs of the library. My work with the library's marketing team to promote resources and services to patrons, and my interest in outreach to campus constituencies not generally associated with the library, correlated with Jim's ambition to raise the library's profile at Lewis & Clark and beyond. A position focused on communications and outreach seemed a likely possibility; however, when Jim proposed a position entitled Library Advancement Coordinator, I was unsure what he meant.

A Library Advancement Coordinator is a unique position in liberal arts college libraries, where many assume the primacy of the library is understood by all. However, due to numerous factors, this is not always the case, and the library has a responsibility to educate its institutional colleagues about its value, both on and off campus. College libraries engage their campus communities in a variety of ways, most often focusing on academic life and the primary clientele of students and faculty. However, as Jim pointed out, there are additional constituencies a robust library needs to consider and with whom it needs to develop strong relationships to build campus-wide support. These include budget allocating administrators, central development officers, public relations specialists, academic support and administrative staff, as well as alumni, donors, and friends. Just as libraries engage their campus communities by having liaisons to academic departments, establishing relationships with additional campus offices can help to raise college-wide understanding and appreciation of the library.

The primary responsibilities of the Library Advancement Coordinator at Lewis & Clark have been to focus the library's external communications, coordinate large events, and build bridges with campus constituencies which had not been engaged in an organized way in the past, beginning with Institutional Advancement. This division of the college is responsible for coordinating the efforts of Public Affairs and Communications, Alumni and Parent Relations, and Central Development. Inroads have been made in each of these areas over the past few years, with varying levels of success.

The library's marketing team was responsible for maintaining a news blog on the library homepage to highlight current exhibits and events, new acquisitions, and other items of public interest. However, these items were not promoted beyond the library site to potentially reach a wider audience. After working with the marketing team to fine-tune the news feature and create a library events page, promotion of library news to the office of Public Affairs and Communications has developed to the point where all library events are automatically submitted for posting on the college's online events calendar, and library news is submitted for consideration as campus news features on the college website and as stories for the college alumni magazine. Similarly, the library sends information to the student newspaper for on-campus coverage, so both internal and external audiences are better informed.

Outreach to Alumni and Parent Relations has led to improved communication of



library services for alumni and better library support of alumni and parent activities. In the past, Watzek Library's Special Collections and Archives had worked most closely with this office to support their efforts and showcase collections. The library continues to develop and sponsor events for alumni and parents, and participation has expanded to a point where staff from all library departments are now involved when Watzek hosts "coffee breaks" for parents during New Student Orientation and Family Weekend. The library has also made efforts to become a space where alumni receptions and other campus events can be held in support of the campus community.

With no formal experience in fundraising, my work with Central Development has presented the largest learning curve. I now have a better understanding of how relationships are built with donors through identification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship, and I more fully appreciate the important and challenging role of this office. After establishing a formal contact with a staff person in Central Development who agreed to serve as a library liaison, I am working to better communicate library needs and articulate the potential the library brings to campus fundraising. In my role as Library Advancement Coordinator, I have reviewed the giving history of the library's donor base, created new stewardship initiatives by sending annual mailings to highlight achievements over the past year, and thanked donors for their support. Most recently this was done as an online Year in Review with an accompanying postcard with the Year in Review's URL mailed to donors and friends. (Library, 2012) Although there is still tremendous opportunity for growth in this relationship, significant groundwork has been laid.

In an effort to promote the library to campus staff who might not think of it as a resource for professional needs and leisure activities, the marketing team created a Staff Services brochure to complement the brochures already in place for students and faculty. Digital copies were sent to staff, and print copies were sent to the College's Human Resources office for distribution to new employees. As a result of outreach to Human Resources, a stop at the library is now included during the campus tours given to new employees. This visit provides an opportunity for the library to welcome new employees and briefly introduce them to resources for professional and personal use. The intention is that the library will become more visible and remembered as a resource for everyone on campus, and perhaps be considered a benefit of employment at the college. Watzek Library has also supported staff development programs sponsored by Human Resources by organizing events highlighting Special Collections and facilitating a faculty and staff book club discussion.

With the changing nature of research and information environments, academic libraries of all sizes benefit from reflection on their roles and responsibilities, and from consideration of the value libraries bring to campus, as well as how this value can be better articulated and promoted. In terms of establishing the new role of Library Advancement Coordinator at Watzek Library, the vision and support of Jim Kopp cannot be overstated, as well as my participation in the Academic Library Advancement and Development Network (ALADN) for professional development in these areas. Although nobody ever graduates from a library as they do from an academic department, few graduate without them, and, now more than ever, it is important to share with colleagues across campus how the library benefits the entire college. 🌿



References

Aubrey R. Watzek Library. *Year in Review, 2010–2011*. Retrieved from: http://library.lclark.edu/lib/annual_reports/2011.html