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Building community between high school and college librarians

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Supplementary material for *Building Community Between High School and College Librarians*

A poster presentation at ACRL 2023, Pittsburgh, PA.

Presented by Sarah Vital, User Experience and Communication Librarian, Saint Mary's College of California

This document shares the outline of things we suggest considering in planning your own workshop to bring together academic and high school librarians in your community.

The extensive footnotes are narrations of what we have experienced at SMC in particular.

This document is static in the campus' institutional repository, but feel free to follow along on the live Google Doc to leave your own comments.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KsZWKP7fiv4qrLPC6FzflQGDwYEE/DHe89EYAozunTX0/>

See poster here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FTH8V9Qgby1BiHWd889uc4awzrWg8153/>



History

The librarians at SMC felt disconnected from the experience of high school students. We didn't know what to expect of our incoming first-year students.

We had also heard about local cuts, and knew many schools were losing library access, and we wanted to see what we could do to help.

So in 2015, we decided to plan a one-day workshop to get to know our local high school librarians.

It really was as simple and casual as that!

Goals

Our Year One Goals

- Share information about the information literacy experiences of high schoolers and expectations of college¹
- Make connections to be able to help at local high schools
- Increase awareness of our institution among local high school teachers and staff

Our Continuing Goals

- Create a space for overworked, overwhelmed, often isolated professionals to network and decompress²

And

- Share information about the information literacy experiences of high schoolers and expectations of college
- Make connections to be able to help at local high schools
- Increase awareness of our institution among local high school teachers and staff

¹ Emphasizing a sharing community was important to us. School librarians are professionals and they don't need us to act as some kind of expert to them. We wanted to recognize our shared experiences as librarians and learn the specifics of each others' professional specialties, settings, and experience.

² Our first year was a trial run. It was very informal. We had no idea if anyone would come and what they'd want. We dutifully lined up some speakers and had activities, and quickly learned the attendees were just so happy to have a low-key event to network. We scrapped an afternoon session just to let the attendees talk. There were frustrations shared, tears shed, advice given, bonds formed, and hope renewed. The quote "this is the first time I've had lunch with an adult since August!" (shared through smiles and tears) became our own rallying point. More than anything, we wanted to continue this workshop to give our local colleagues a space.

Planning

1. Book

- Find a date³
 - When are other important PD events?
 - When is your campus less busy?
 - What makes sense for you all?
- Book a space
 - Does your library have event space?
 - Does your campus have reservable event space?⁴
- Establish budget
 - What needs to be paid for?⁵
 - Do you need to charge a fee to cover? Or can you find a sponsor?⁶

³ We settled on a date in late January. In January, our university is in January Term, a semester-in-a-month session that is less busy. For the simplest reason, we chose this because we have the most space reservation availability and open on-campus parking.

⁴ At SMC, we can book a space for an event (even with outside attendees) for no cost.

⁵ Again at SMC, since we have no space fee, the only expenses are catering and any speaker fees or gifts. Our speakers have not charged, but we have given small honorariums and/or comped registration fees for speakers.

⁶ Our first year we had some support from another campus office to cover catering. Since then, we've charged the smallest fee possible to cover food costs. (In 2023, we could offer morning refreshments and a full lunch for \$40 a person). We've had some vendors express interest in sponsoring, but we have declined commercial support at this time.

Planning

2. Invite

- Reach out to locals
 - Make a list of local schools (city, county, etc)
 - Send email, postcards⁷
 - Encourage invitees to share!⁸

- Post in listservs
 - Local teacher listservs in your area⁹
 - Social media maybe?
 - Advertise on your own social media
 - @ local high schools

⁷ Our first year, we literally sent a paper invite to a list of schools in our county (and the next closest county. After that first year, we used the first year attendees to help us spread the word.

⁸ Again, never underestimate the power of networks! We reached out to a few people we knew personally, and the tree of contacts exploded! But also be patient. It can take time to grow a list.

⁹ This was first year we posted to a BAISL (Bay Area Independent School Librarians), a local listserv specifically for private school teachers and librarians, and our RSVPs almost doubled!

Planning

3. Coordinate

- Find speakers
 - Tap campus resources
 - Education or Composition faculty?¹⁰
 - Admissions department?¹¹
 - Writing center?
 - Ask for speaker proposals in registration¹²
 - Does someone have a project they want to share?
 - Anyone interested in leading a discussion?
- Set up an agenda
 - Who is on your planning committee?¹³
 - Need at least one person familiar with campus reservations and catering practices¹⁴

¹⁰ We invited speakers from our first year composition program to share the typical first-year assignment. We were spoiled, as she was a huge library ally with a strong research background in information literacy. Other ideas have been disciplinary faculty to share their expectations.

¹¹ The admissions department came the first year to share a bit about the conversations happening in their professional circles about college readiness.

¹² By far, the most rewarding presentations have come from high school librarian colleagues! Many have projects they've worked on and would like to share or get feedback on. We've asked for attendees to indicate interest in their RSVP and followed up. Presentations have been formal (i.e., things also presented at larger conferences) and more informal idea workshopping.

¹³ Right now, the planning committee is made up of 3-4 SMC librarians who were simply interested in participating. We'd much rather have high school librarians involved in the planning process. We solicited interest in the last session evaluation and will reach out in the Fall when we begin planning the next one.

¹⁴ Our administrative assistant is the true hero. She's the inside knowledge on everything from reserving parking for presenters to the best deals with our campus caterer. She does an incredible amount of heavy lifting!

- Consider themes
- Consider timing
 - Don't over-pack!¹⁵
 - Leave a lot of time for information discussion
- Have food!
 - Consider ease¹⁶
 - Consider a variety of options¹⁷
 - Order for a couple of extra people

¹⁵ Don't over program! We stress the "low-key" and "casualness" of the day and try to resist the professional urge to plan a full, official conference. It is a workshop, meant to be open and social. We are very open and transparent about expectations of this day. We've had some interest from librarians in southern California, and they are welcome of course, but we are clear to share that the day might not be worth a flight and hotel unless they happen to be coming up for other things. This widespread interest is why we are sharing this practice and encouraging other institutions to host similar events.

¹⁶ Use your campus resources here. It might be "cheaper" to do this yourself with an outside option, but it adds to difficulty. Our campus has a living-wage stipulation in vendor contracts, so our catering is a bit more costly than if we brought in food. But, a) supporting the campus' living-wage commitment is important to us, b) the cost includes professional set up and support, and c) is one less thing for you to think about in day-of.

¹⁷ One year we didn't think to have a gluten free option, so one of the SMC librarians took an attendee to the campus dining hall for get lunch. It turned out to be a fun experience, but we want to be sure to be more inclusive and will be asking for more dietary preferences in the registration.

Basic Planning Checklist

- Send “save the date” / interest form 3-4 months in advance
 - Invite topic ideas and speaker interest
- Line up speakers / set agenda
- Establish a budget / set fee
- Send actual invite with agenda and registration link at least 6 weeks ahead
 - Have option for online payment
 - Have option for checks (some school districts need
 - Ask about dietary preferences and any needed accommodations
- Have an option to create invoices in case someone needs one for reimbursement
- Submit catering order (usually at least a week in advance)
- Confirm any technology needs / set-up
- Send final information to registrants (i.e., directions, parking / transit information)
- Set up an online place to share speaker materials
- Prepare a roster of attendees with email to share with attendees
- On day of, establish on “runner” from your planning group who can tend to administrative or supportive things as they arise
- Send an after event follow-up in a day or two

Future

“The event runs itself” is a partial truism passed from one planning committee lead to the next. Like with any event, it is not a small amount of planning. But the day really does run itself through the energy and interest in the small group of similar professionals.

The positive feedback we’ve had from attendees and a large amount of returning participants has shown that this is a valuable event for them.

And what WE have learned is invaluable. The high school librarians’ students are our incoming first years, and understanding where they’ve been and what they’ve expected helps us tremendously. Something as small as learning that high school libraries often serve as the textbook lender has helped us understand why we get so many confused first-years wanting to “pick up their books.” Knowing this can help us better coordinate with the books store and better communicate with the students the difference.

We will continue to host this event annually, for our high school colleagues and for us.

So the future is growth! In particular, we want to

1. Spread the word!

This has been such a valuable experience for our academic library and for our high school (and middle school!) colleagues, we want others to have similar experiences.

- a. ACRL poster session or presentation
- b. Publication of some kind
- c. Session at a school library gathering

- d. Partnership with another academic institution to do a more formal study for an article or chapter
2. Expand the planning committee to middle and high school library professionals.

While we have input from the high school librarians, we'd love to have them take a more active role in the future and direction of the workshop. We'd love to be able to step back from the planning and just be able to provide the space and administrative help as needed.

3. Find ways to continue the community online throughout the year.

We've experimented with Facebook groups and Discord servers. We'll continue to utilize technology to try to keep the group together and the conversations happening.