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Ad Astra per Aspera: Aspiring to Excellence in Challenging Times

WATC Library “Flies” Way Outside the Box All the Way to the Aviation Department

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Abstract

When the Library asked the Aviation department, "What can we do for you?" the response was, "Can you help straighten out a tool area?" Using ACRL standards as a guide, the Library was able to gain approval, make contacts, and provide services in a non-traditional partnership project.

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The academic library of a technical college has specific areas of expertise that can be utilized to propel the Library's presence into college departmental areas that may not consider the Library as a partner. ACRL recently approved new *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (ALA, October 2011), and the Library has a responsibility to practice these standards. The expectation of a professional level of expertise within these standards can form a justification for the Library when advocating for providing non-traditional services.

The Library for Wichita Area Technical College is located at a campus that deals primarily with students involved in the Medical and Allied Health programs and General Education classes that are comparable to any other two-year college. All courses are accredited and the Library follows the standards that go along with the accreditation. Another campus, approximately 20 minutes away, deals with Technical programs only. The major area is Aviation which includes Airframe and Power-plant licensing, maintenance, avionics, coatings and painting. The plan for the Library was to promote itself to the technical programs, with special emphasis on the Aviation area.

It began as a question of "How can the Library help you?" I posed this question to several Aviation faculty at an all-campus open house. The response came from the teacher in charge of the tool area and the FAA (Federal Aviation Agency) library. "I need some help organizing and checking out tools." At about the same time, a comment was made by a Tech Sergeant at McConnell Air Force Base to me that they check out tools just like a library. These two comments sparked an idea to utilize the LS (library system) to check out tools. The WATC teacher thought this was a way to help solve his problems. Together, we were allowed to tour the tool crib at McConnell Air Force Base. It was determined by the teacher that he learned much about sorting, organizing, and logistics from the Air Force tour and I was able to compare the Air Force system to the LS and found much in common.

The Library and Air Force both used a computerized system, with wands and barcodes. Both systems could check for overdue items, patron usage, due dates, inventory, and other standards of a library operation. The ways they differed were the type of items that were being checked out and the length of time for checkout. The Air Force operated on a daily checkout for all items, while the Library operated on a flexible checkout, depending on the item; most were for a month. The Air Force had to deal with consumables. Those were items that were recorded in an inventory system, but not checked out through their computer checkout.

Resource to Assist in the Presentation of the Project

With the information gained from the tour, we made a plan to present the idea for partnership to the administration. The Academic Vice-President and Dean of Aviation were willing to listen and interested in having a computerized checkout system, but they weren't absolutely confident the Library should be involved. The Library referred to the ACRL *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (ALA, October 2011) as a reference and found specifics to justify the plan.

According to the External Relations Standard, *the Library communicates with the campus community regularly* (ALA October, 2011). Prior to the building of the NCAT campus, the Aviation department had been located at two separate buildings in different areas of the city. There was no library for them and their tool areas were small. The Library needed to grow into an awareness of the Library to the Aviation Department and the checkout system would be the beginning of that awareness.

The Institutional Effectiveness Standard states that the "Library contributes to student recruitment, retention, and academic success "(ALA October, 2011). Since WATC promoted itself as a state-of-the-art facility for aerospace, it was counter-productive for the students to be using sign-out sheets that were hard to track, and antiquated for statistical gathering. The checkout system would be in view when prospective students toured and it could be shown to other stakeholders of the college.

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The Professional Values Standard emphasizes, "*User-centered service"* (ALA October, 2011). The students also needed an awareness that a library existed for their use. The Library needed to be present for all students in the college. With this beginning, the plan was for the Library to eventually train the Aviation faculty and the students in Information Literacy and provide them with other materials for personal checkout.

The Professional Values Standard also states that "*the Library engages in collaborations both on campus and across institutional boundaries "* (ALA October, 2011). Not only did the Library need to grow awareness, there needed to be an interactive relationship, with the Aviation department taking an active role in the relationship with the Library. The Aviation department would need to take ownership of the process to make it successful. The Library would provide support for questions that would be "library" in nature, such as setup of the checkout details.

The Professional Values Standard says that "t*he Library shares successes, results, and makes improvements"* (ALA October, 2011). The Library System had recently been updated, so the current product was now web-based. This offered a no-cost solution that could be utilized from anywhere, whether it be in a different department or at another campus. The company was already aware of the project and had determined there would be no charge, since this was not an official "branch" library addition. The Librarian needed to be physically present in the setup and launch of the project and be ready to assist however necessary to make the project a success. There also needed to be follow-up and an evaluation after a specific time period to determine success, any needed adjustments, and possible expansions such as the FAA Library.

The External Relations Standard states that "*Library personnel convey a consistent message about the library and engage in their role as ambassadors in order to expand user awareness of resources, services, and expertise"* (ALA October, 2011). If the Library was to become a viable component for all departments, the Library needed the information about the project to be known across the campuses. Although there was only one librarian, the Aviation department needed to serendipitously become "librarians," and spread the information about the project.

Tarmac (Road) Blocks

The first road block that surfaced was the Dean of the Aviation, who came with the question, "Who's going to know how to run this system if you leave?" I explained there were three sources for help: the LS company had great support and they were aware of the project. I had confidence in his team that I was training. They were excited and ready to work on it and they wanted the project to succeed; soon they would become the experts. Any librarian with an MLS and experience in working with a LS would be able to continue the project. The project was allowed to continue.

To win support of other faculty in the department, I visited with each of them when they stopped by the tool area and eventually, I brought my lunch and ate with them. They soon found out I loved airplanes and my husband was part of the military, which most of them had also been in. They liked the idea of the tool area becoming "computerized," as there had been problems with students forgetting to sign out items and tool boxes not being inspected correctly, so missing items weren't reported in a timely manner.

The Aviation Faculty member explained there were two types of items: checkout items that came back to the area and consumables that needed some type of inventory systems. I explained that the Library system would work best for the checkout, but eventually, we might be able to figure out an inventory system.

The project was launched over a two-month period in the summer and the logistics situations began immediately. Items had to be configured and cataloged differently for inclusion in the system. The items would not show in the Library catalog for the public. Since I had little experience in cataloging, I checked the cataloging records for *equipment* as a source of information and was able to follow their guidance. Our patron records were inserted from the college student system, so I could not change the patron circulation class, so instead, a special item circulation class was set up called 'aviation tools'. A specific checkout period needed to be set up for two shifts each day. By the time this came up in the project, the Aviation Faculty member was calling technical support at the company and working through this problem on his own. There was also a problem of inspection and responsibility for the tool boxes, since the teachers previously did not have a consistent system for inspection, and as a result, this problem was also worked out by the Aviation Faculty member to the pleasure of the entire faculty. The student workers adapted easily to the new system, and soon were training each other with specific system tasks assigned to each. The logistical situations continue to be worked on and the project has been determined a success by those in the tool area, including the Dean, and the Academic Vice-President.

The FAA Library was in a separate area, and included the paper resources from long ago that were not in the computerized system. The Library staff straightened the items on the shelves and provided bookends. It was determined to not catalog the materials for checkout.

Evaluation of the Endeavor

The standards of ACRL serve as a basis for evaluation of the project from the Library's perspective. According to the External Relations Standard *"The Library communicates with the campus community regularly"* (ALA October, 2011) . At a recent faculty in -service, I was given time to speak about the Library and our services. This was a direct result of the project with the Aviation area.

The Professional Values Standard: "*User-centered service"* (ALA October, 2011), definitely applies because the Aviation instructors have been outspoken in their support of the library's programs. Their students have started to request Interlibrary Loans. A magazine rack of library-ordered magazines will soon be put in their area.

The Professional Values Standard, "*The Library engages in collaborations both on campus and across institutional boundaries"* certainly applies here because after the recent Big Read in Wichita of the book, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, which was about the Vietnam War. Because of the ongoing project and contact, four of the faculty members agreed to tape an interview about their experiences during the Vietnam War and one was the featured reader at the Big Read kickoff event.

The Professional Values Standard, which states that "*The Library shares successes, results, and makes improvements",* can be applied once again because this project became a conversation throughout campus; other areas are interested in working with the Library.

The External Relations Standard: *Library personnel convey a consistent message about the library and engage in their role as ambassadors in order to expand user awareness of resources, services, and expertise,* was also applied because I was able to speak at CULS about the project and a few colleges and universities came asking questions about areas at their schools that may benefit from the same experience, so the conversation continues.

I wish to make the suggestion that librarians should "act" way outside the traditions of the Library, not just think outside. Ask the question, "Where can I act?" and then be willing to make the commitment of time, personal contact, and work to make it a success, rising to the same level as the standards set for our profession.

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