

Library Outreach After COVID: Making the Case for In-Person Library Visits

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Abstract : Academic libraries have always struggled with engaging with students and faculty. Striking the balance between what the community needs and what the library can afford has also been a point of contention for libraries. As academia begins to return to a new normal after COVID, library staff are rethinking how remind patrons that the library is open and ready for business. NC Wesleyan, a small liberal arts school in eastern North Carolina, decided to be proactive and reach out to the academic community. After shutting down in 2020 for COVID, the campus library saw a marked decrease in in-person attendance. For a small school whose operational budget was tied directly to tuition payments, it was imperative for the library to remind faculty and staff that they were open for business. At the beginning of the Summer 2022 term and continuing into the fall, the reference team created a marketing plan using email, physical meetings, and virtual events targeted at students and faculty as well as community members who utilized the facilities prior to COVID. The email blasts were gentle reminders that the building was open and available for use. The target audiences were the community at large. Several of the emails contained reminders of previous events in the library that were student centered. The next phase of the email campaign centers on reminding the community about the libraries physical and electronic resources, including the makerspace lab. Language will indicate that student voices are needed, and a QR code is included for students to leave feedback as to what they want to see in the library. The final phase of the email blasts were faculty focused and invited them to connect with library reference staff for an in-person consultation on their research needs. While this phase is ongoing, the response has been positive, and staff are compiling data in hopes of working with administration to implement some of the requested services and materials. These email blasts will be followed up by in-person meetings with faculty and students who responded to the QR codes. This research is ongoing. This type of targeted outreach is new for Wesleyan. It is the hope of the library that by the end of Fall 2022, there will be a plan in place to address the needs and concerns of the students and faculty. Furthermore, the staff hopes to create a new sense of community for the students and staff of the university.

Keywords : academic, education, libraries, outreach

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