

## **Hooking your Audience: Tailored Instruction Marketing**

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**Abstract:** Reaching a targeted audience is the crux of any good marketing plan, but selecting the right strategies can ensure one's message is heard. In 2016, Georgia State University Library, Dunwoody Campus, adopted a new approach toward faculty outreach via a liaison program. The library launched a multiyear marketing plan focused on tailoring promotional materials and new strategies to specific faculty with the goal of increasing instruction numbers and collaboration. This article outlines strategic development of the marketing plan, the most successful tactics, and recommendations for promotional materials, overall impact, and future directions.

**Keywords:** academic libraries, library outreach programs, guerilla marketing, instruction, faculty collaboration

### **Introduction**

Building connections with faculty is essential for academic librarians who wish to create a robust library instruction program, but faculty connections are even more vital when librarians are tasked with cultivating and managing an instruction program across multiple campuses. Georgia State University's Perimeter College has five campuses spread across the Atlanta metropolitan area. The libraries at these campuses serve over 20,000 first- and second-year students as well as 424 faculty members who float between two or more of the college's locations. In the fall of 2015, the Dunwoody campus library was tasked with improving faculty outreach, with the goal of establishing collaborative faculty networks and increasing instruction across all subject areas. Prior to this, library outreach had been unstructured and untracked. Faculty initiated most interaction with the library, with the bulk of this engagement coming from the English department.

The library's solution was to devise a targeted marketing plan aimed at the Dunwoody faculty that would establish a more structured line of communication and promotion of library and liaison services. The first step in this process was developing a liaison program in which librarians would serve as the primary point of contact and provide individualized attention to

departments or specific programs. The second step was designing marketing materials and strategies that were tailored for specific liaison subject areas.

## **SWOT**

Before beginning work on the marketing plan, the library team needed to identify existing areas of strength and weakness, possible opportunities, and potential threats to the plan.

### **Strengths**

- New librarians who provided fresh energy and new ideas
- Use of open access graphic-design software such as Canva

### **Weaknesses**

- A “let them come to us” culture among library staff and faculty
- Ongoing misconceptions of the library instruction program

### **Opportunities**

- Liaison program
- Grassroots/individual interactions with faculty

### **Threats**

- University consolidation and concerns regarding personnel changes, branding, and transitions
- Faculty preferred modes of communication and inconsistent use of e-mail

To make the plan a success, the team had to overcome the serious challenge of staff and faculty’s reactive “let them come to us” culture and shift it into a more proactive and engaged attitude. Misconceptions concerning the library’s instruction program also stifled many faculty’s interest in what the library could offer. With the impending consolidation of Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College that was to occur in December 2015, it was imperative that the library establish a marketing platform to communicate the upcoming changes. The creation of a new liaison program provided the opportunity to start fresh, building more purposeful and planned connections.

Another threat that needed to be considered was faculty’s preferred modes of communication. Because faculty used e-mail inconsistently, the team knew that it would need to develop marketing tactics that did not rely solely on e-mail. When designing marketing materials, the team also needed to take into consideration the university’s changing visual identity. This included updating e-mail signatures, official branding, and library terminology.

## **Developing a Strategy**

With a better understanding of what they were working toward, the team dove into the development phase of the outreach strategy. The university’s class schedule and archived

instruction data served as obvious resources. Accessing the semester's course schedule allowed members to become more familiar with the offerings within each discipline, including information about assigned staff course-load and departmental overlap. The instructional data provided insight into the library's historical relationships with specific departments as well as demand rates for both scheduling and instructional needs.

The librarians also decided to draw on the institutional knowledge of colleagues both inside and outside the library. Conversations with colleagues on other campuses added much-needed nuance to the team's understanding of departmental cultures across campus, particularly with faculty who straddled campus assignments. With a deeper grasp of the opportunities that remained untapped or were ripe for reestablishment, team members worked together to build broad benchmarks for fulfilling the outreach strategy via communication concerning services, resources, and collaborative opportunities. In some instances, the liaisons knew they would be approaching departments with little to no previous instructional collaboration with the library.

### **Following Best Practices**

When making initial contact, the team agreed to start with a broad introductory e-mail from the library's department head. The letter introduced the liaison librarian program and outlined basic library services and resources that would pertain to most faculty. Because time and attention are always valuable commodities on an academic campus, this first message was kept short yet informative by using bullet points to highlight the values of working with the library and to avoid wordiness or overwhelming content.

Liaison librarians then contacted their assigned groups and departments with a customized e-mail that outlined a menu of services likely to appeal to their specific disciplines and included a personal introduction and accompanying contact information. Both e-mails could then be read at the convenience of the faculty member as well as provide an opener for the librarians to follow up in person later.

To better know their audiences, each librarian reached out to colleagues in other departments for advice on preferred follow-up approaches. They learned that, even within an individual discipline, communication preferences and styles varied widely among faculty members.

- Some faculty preferred the anonymity and convenience of electronic contact.
- Some never responded to bulk e-mails or messages forwarded from the department chair.
- Still others preferred face-to-face interaction.

Regardless of how they made the follow-up contact, team members understood that they would likely either be asked for some time to think about the pitch or asked to follow up after the initial few weeks of the semester. Many faculty members found their time and attention was pulled in many directions at the beginning of the term, so an on-the-spot commitment was atypical. However, a few faculty took immediate interest and quickly fell into the role of enthusiastic collaborator.

## Getting Creative

After the initial rush of the semester ended, the liaisons decided to reconnect with reluctant faculty to gauge interest and need. Rather than sending another e-mail and deluging inboxes, several of the librarians brainstormed to devise some nontraditional methods for grabbing attention, including:

- Repackaging of instructional offerings and promotional materials by highlighting them as a restaurant menu (Figure 1).
- Creating custom promotional candy-bar wrappers and attaching a business card (Figure 2).
- Enrolling as a student.
- Creating sample assignment guides to show (rather than tell) the versatility and customization available in a collaborative tool.
- Hosting a mix-and-mingle event with coffee, cookies, and fruit to entice faculty to the library to hear more about services and resources (Figure 3).

**Library**  
INSTRUCTION  
*At Dunwoody*

**MAINS**

**CHEESEBURGER**  
(aka **Traditional Library Instruction**)  
Assignment-driven face-to-face instruction in your classroom OR at the library that helps students navigate library resources and evaluate information critically! Consider adding a citation workshop or webinar element to balance out the assignment.

**BACON DOUBLE CHEESEBURGER**  
(aka **Embedded Librarian**)  
Take traditional instruction to the next level by incorporating an embedded librarian in your class. Students can receive synchronous or asynchronous research help throughout the semester, as well as tiered Info lit instruction

**DESSERTS**

**CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE**  
(aka **Special Projects**)  
Consider collaborating with a librarian to create Open Access materials, co-host a mini-conference that encourages students to publicly present their work, and so much MORE!

**APPETIZERS**

**QUICK BITES SAMPLER**  
(aka **Basic Subject LibGuide**)  
Try a short 15-20 minute library mini-topic, such as citations, orientation to library services/resources or an introduction to a specific database.

**BREAD BASKET**  
(aka **Basic Subject LibGuide**)  
Contains the basic ingredients for students to conduct general research on broad topics within a discipline.

**CUP OF SOUP**  
(aka **Assignment-Specific Guide**)  
Tailored to your preferred source types, this guide covers material and research skills necessary for students to navigate the assignment and meet the required graded elements.

**BEVERAGES**

**VANILLA MILKSHAKE**  
(aka **Assignment-Specific Guide with DELUXE features**)  
Collaborate with a librarian to develop an assignment-specific LibGuide but ALSO incorporate a research skill(s) assessment and/or a flipped classroom element that allows students to learn mechanical skills on their own, which leaves the time to focus on the critical thinking skills during face-to-face instruction.

**Reservations?**  
[HTTP://RESEARCH.LIBRARY.GSU.EDU/INSTRUCTION\\_FORM](http://research.library.gsu.edu/instruction_form)

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

## Designing Eye-Catching Materials

Many of the above outreach efforts included creating marketing materials, whether print, digital, or both. Team members focused on creating materials that would be eye-catching and memorable by using free or inexpensive online tools like Canva, BeFunky, Snappa, and Infogram. These products provided access to templates, tutorials, and graphics that gave professional flair to even the most basic flyer, social media post, or e-newsletter (Figure 4). These web-based tools offered plenty of graphic design basics and tips to help even the most novice designer. (Note: If your library has funds available for something more elaborate, consider using your institution's

onsite print services to create a flyer or brochure.) Special care was given to check with the library's communications office about institutional branding and marketing requirements before sharing any newly created materials, whether in print or digital.



Figure 4.

## Following Through

From the very beginning, the team stressed following through as an important component of marketing the library. During the strategy phase, the liaisons learned that some of the lapsed relationships with departments occurred when there was a lack of follow-through. Everyone understood the need to commit themselves to providing the service and fulfilling the promises of the elevator pitch. Follow-through included timely and regular communication as well as meeting the expectation to produce high-quality instructional deliverables, such as fully-functional LibGuides and well-prepared lessons with outcomes and assessments.

A second facet of follow-through that the team discussed was pacing the workload and not overcommitting. Librarians made sure to document any specific requests or timeline contingencies that developed from liaison collaboration and communication. Several members struggled with the temptation to meet all the newfound demand and needed to be especially careful to avoid overcommitting in terms of staffing and scheduling.

## Tracking Progress

To analyze and assess the plan's impact, the team was tasked with closely tracking the following information about each faculty member whom they contacted:

- The courses they were teaching;
- The marketing strategy or strategies that were used to reach out to the faculty member;
- Whether any of the strategies proved successful in building a connection with that faculty member; and
- The results of that connection (e.g., instruction session, assignment collaboration, embedded course presence).

This information was tracked mostly through e-mail responses from faculty and not collected in any systematic way. Findings were reported at end-of-semester librarians' meetings to show what worked and what did not.

The team also sent a survey to faculty after the mix-and-mingle event to identify future methods of communication, ideal time frames for future marketing plans, and takeaways from the event. The survey was sent to all faculty at Dunwoody to help determine why some of them did not attend the event. The team was not surprised to find that all responding faculty noted that e-mail was the preferred mode of communication. However, several faculty also mentioned Outlook calendar invites as another possibility. All but one faculty recommended that future events be scheduled either before the start of the semester or after the first month of the semester. The last question of the survey asked, "What is one specific takeaway from this event that you will use again?" While most faculty left the takeaway question unanswered, the few responses that came in provided us with the information needed to determine the effectiveness of the marketing strategy:

- Online tutorial resources,
- Openness and availability of the library faculty, and
- Help regarding faculty research.

## Evaluating the Experience

The overall strategy was a success. As noted above, the team's efforts were effective and productive. The team saw several benefits:

- Novel approaches created new business.
- The strategy provided a built-in outlet for sharing new or changed library offerings.
- New collaborations built buzz within departments and led to additional opportunities.
- Faculty seemed more receptive to non-traditional marketing than traditional e-mail marketing.

The team also saw the need for improvements:

- A uniform tracking system would help with post-outreach evaluation.
- Regular check-ins might serve as motivator for accountability as well as a check on exuberant overcommitting.

Looking at broad lessons for libraries, the team suggests starting with a few of the strongest and most promising leads. The solid results from initial efforts should create the buzz and word-of-mouth recommendations that lead to more business and new collaboration.

## Looking to the Future

Since the inception of the liaison-driven faculty marketing plan, the Dunwoody library team has increased its instruction numbers, brought in new faculty, and created collaborative projects with several faculty. The team has seen significant growth in its relationships with different departments across campus, including anthropology, business, environmental science, history, political science, and English. While each semester brings its own unique challenges, including frequent faculty rotations amongst the five campuses, these challenges motivate the team to stay current and consistent with its outreach efforts.

Moving forward, the team plans to help build liaison programs across all Perimeter College campuses and establish cross-campus collaboration that includes subject librarians at the Atlanta campus. The library's new online learning librarian also is opening new opportunities to reach out to online faculty who do not have a face-to-face presence on campus.

## References

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