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## **Fresh out of 1968: Designing an Effective Crowdfunding Campaign for the Academic Library**

**Amber Leibundgut-Peterson**

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

**Marc Manke**

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

**Chelsea Wyman-Green**

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

**Abstract:** Amid a sudden 20% budget reduction and pandemic recovery, librarians and staff at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library embarked on a crowdfunding campaign to improve student study spaces. With a detailed communications plan, strategic messaging, and targeted donor pool, the library's first campaign was a success and raised more than \$10,000. Using this experience as a case study, this article explores how to design and implement a compelling crowdfunding campaign as a part of a library's solicitation repertoire while also discussing areas that could be improved, such as the need for stronger campus partnerships and how the campaign pacing made collaboration and content creation somewhat challenging.

**Keywords:** Academic libraries, events and programming, library marketing, promotion, graphic design

## Introduction

Fundraising to supplement, or even sustain, library budgets has become common practice. While a relatively new concept within libraries, crowdfunding is a well-established method to fund new projects or cover emergency costs for major medical procedures or natural disasters. Recently, Murphy Library at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UWL) embarked on a crowdfunding campaign to fulfill specific space and user needs within the library amid a 20% budget cut. This article outlines how Murphy Library determined a donor audience, designed messaging, and surpassed fundraising goals and highlights the benefits of adding crowdfunding into a library's solicitation repertoire. The ultimate goals of the Murphy Library crowdfunding campaign were:

- To trial a new fundraising method to supplement a decreased library budget by raising \$8,500.
- To explore best practices for engaging and communicating with current and future donors.

## Literature Review

Fundraising is a common concept in libraries, which often have well-established solicitation programs and donor streams. Traditionally, academic libraries rely on a variety of activities to raise funds including fines, photocopy fees, endowment fundraising drives, room rentals, community member fees, special events, "Friends of the Library" groups, and conferences (Shaifuddin, Rushdi, & Sani, 2020; Dilworth & Heyns, 2020). However, as budgets remain stagnant or, more commonly, face steep cuts, reexamining fundraising opportunities is more important than ever.

One complication in creating a robust fundraising program in academic libraries is the dedicated staff time and training needed to be truly effective. In a research report outlining fundraising in smaller nonprofits, researchers found that "in the context of total income from major gifts we found a significant and positive association between training and total income. Each additional form of training is associated with an additional \$37,000 of income" (Sargeant, Eisenstein, & Kottasz, 2015, p. 61). While the authors could not prove that education was the sole cause of this increase in funds, there was a correlation between staff who received education via formal certifications, conferences, workshops, and informal information sharing among trained fundraising

staff resulting in higher donations. Following this trend, the average staff time allocated to fundraising increased from 1.5 FTE to 2 FTE from 1994 to 2020 (Dilworth & Heyns, 2020). However, even with increased fundraising staff, academic libraries have faced a decline in philanthropic funding over the past ten years. In comparison to other units on campus, academic libraries demonstrated the slowest rate of growth during this time period. Possible reasons for these decreases could include increased oversight of communication access to alumni and a library's need for discretionary funding not necessarily tied to specific research or academic programmatic need. Additionally, many libraries struggle to fundraise due to staff feeling unknowledgeable, understaffed, or overburdened by the bureaucratic steps required by the university to access donors (Shaifuddin et al., 2021).

With traditional fundraising methods offering declining returns, it is becoming more common to turn to crowdfunding to increase revenue. Crowdfunding is "online, open, public and purposeful fundraising for a specific project and most often for a specific capital goal" (Riley-Huff, Herrera, Ivey, & Harry, 2016, p. 67). Frequently used to provide initial funding for new projects or fundraise for unforeseen events, crowdfunding is becoming a much more common way to reach a large range of donors where every donation, large or small, helps the campaign succeed (Riley-Huff et al., 2016). While relatively new, the growing research into crowdfunding has identified several trends leading to campaign success. These trends cover a variety of fundraising campaign needs such as: identifying a clear funding need, developing and delivering a message tailored to a specific audience, and having a dedicated team to see the project through (Bushong, Cleveland, & Cox, 2018).

To better contextualize crowdfunding, one study surveyed 382 galleries, libraries, archives, and museums regarding their impressions of crowdfunding as a fundraising avenue. A wide majority of respondents came from the library sector (205 total) with wide-ranging sizes and operating budgets. The researchers identified core issues to address when engaging in crowdfunding including developing acceptance, trust and credibility, social capital and community within the donor pool; finding a suitable platform to collect money, identifying appropriate project and donor types; and accounting for additional staff time commitments (Riley-Huff, Herrera, Ivey, & Harry, 2016).

As mentioned, when developing a crowdfunding campaign, identifying a suitable donor pool is an important first step. Typically, successful library crowdfunding events

rely on monetary gifts from the organization's employees, previous donors or known supporters, users, visitors, and corporate sponsors (Riley-Huff et al., 2016). A suitable crowdfunding pool should also address a shared culture. These unstated commonalities are often directly related to the shared history and experiences of the community's members. Tapping into this shared culture is one way to create buy-in when outlining the benefits of a campaign (Josefy, Dean, Albert, & Fitza, 2017). This idea also encompasses those working toward a campaign goal. Staff should choose a fundraising need that resonates not only with their audience, but also themselves as crowdfunding is "a sprint, not a marathon, so projects must be able to maintain momentum" (Bushong et al., 2018, p. 314). Staff must maintain continuous enthusiasm to proactively promote and frequently update the current and potential donors on the campaign progress.

In further identifying a potential donor pool, fundraising staff should start engaging current students, as the "academic library fulfills a critical role with engaging current students and facilitating their success in the academic environment. These engaged students then tend to become engaged alumni who contribute to the future needs of the institution" (Griffith & Kealty, 2018, p. 205). Creating engaged alumni for the academic library can be as simple as continued access to library resources, communications such as newsletters and emails about campus events, and career development services (Griffith & Kealty, 2018).

An additional consideration in the success of fundraising campaigns hinges on the language used. Depending on the messaging framework chosen, there is an emotional response to the fundraising plea ranging from guilt and manipulation (exclusive-loss framed messaging) to belonging and community altruism (inclusive-gain framed messaging). To demonstrate, exclusive messaging would refer to the campaign in terms of "I" whereas inclusive messaging would engage donors with the use of "we." Loss messaging would promote the campaign by saying, "If you do not donate, the library will lose access to resources." In contrast, gain messaging would suggest to donors, "Your donations will provide life-changing access to the resources our students need." While the authors noted that there is no clear messaging that proves the most persuasive, successful projects were more often "emotive, thoughtful and conversational than unsuccessful projects" (Yilmaz & Blackburn, 2020, p. 33). Additionally, utilizing clear, concise, and consistent language to communicate the campaign's message via texts, graphics, video, or other media suggested a campaigner's commitment to success and fostered backers' trust (Shneor & Vik, 2019; Koch & Siering, 2019). Tailoring messaging

to address philanthropy, vicarious achievement, and affiliation was a determining factor in motivating university students to support a crowdfunding campaign through either monetary donations or sharing campaign information (Cho, Lemon, Levenshus, & Childers, 2019).

When distributing a crowdfunding campaign's message, social media—used in conjunction with web and well-established email communication—formed the basis of a successful project promotion. A robust communication plan, modes for thanking donors, and an active planning committee were also key to success (Bushong et al., 2018). Fiore (2018) also emphasized the importance of the makeup of the planning team, stating, "You will need enthusiastic staff who are willing to stick out a potentially long process and are able to adapt to any challenges that may arise" (p. 35). Several factors that were positively associated with successful crowdfunding campaigns: they were often in the technology or non-profit sector, they addressed learning and experience-based legitimacy effects, and they were impacted by the number of social media followers and shares (Schneor & Vik, 2019).

After the campaign ends, it is essential for organizations to recognize donors' generosity. Psychological literature suggests that positive emotions are a result of gratitude and can motivate future donor behaviors (Feng, Xu, & Wang, 2021). Organizations often use gratitude to cultivate relationships with donors in forms such as public donor lists on websites, newsletters, a thank you given in person, or via a letter. In contrast, receiving small gifts such as pens, coffee mugs, or tote bags may impede future donations (Newman & Shen, 2012). It is also suggested that the person or group who sends the thank you can impact future donor behaviors. For example, receiving a thank you from someone who benefited from the donation is more impactful than a more generic letter from the charity soliciting donations (Wenting et al., 2021). Higher social status donors tend to donate due to a stronger belief in reciprocity (e.g., "if I donate to this charity, this will benefit my business"), and lower social status donors tend to give more generously in response to gratitude (Liu & Hao, 2017). While limited to a single higher education institution, one study found that recently graduated alumni were more likely to give if they received scholarships to attend or had parental financial support during their collegiate career. Additionally, those who identified more with the university or participated in campus groups were more likely to donate (Freeland, Spenner, & McCalmon, 2015; Diaz Vidal & Pittz, 2019). Stewardship activities such as

demonstrating respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and trust with donors are essential for higher education institutions and impact continued giving (Harrison, 2018).

## **Description of Campaign**

### **Background**

In December of 2020, the director of Murphy Library was approached by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UWL) Foundation to gauge possible interest in developing a crowdfunding campaign. Crowdfunding was a relatively new part of the university's fundraising program, and the Foundation was looking for campus units to apply to participate. A handful of units had undertaken crowdfunding and been successful, so the library director agreed to pursue a campaign. Because the budget had been static for some time and then was impacted with a sudden, 20% cut due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the original idea was for a small-scale campaign to supplement the now reduced book budget. At the time, the deadline to apply for spring 2021 campaigns was fast approaching when the library's Outreach Unit was brought in to consult on the project. Due to the short timeline, the application was paused so that a thoroughly planned campaign could be developed.

### **Project Planning**

Creating the crowdfunding plan included forming a leadership team, identifying student needs, determining target donor pool, creating messaging, laying out a comprehensive timeline, and developing other details to ensure campaign success. The first step in the crowdfunding plan process was forming the leadership team. Because there is no formal fundraising position or unit at Murphy Library, a team needed to be strategically formed to include library personnel whose roles would best support the project and had a balance of creative and logistical attributes. After agreeing to the campaign, the library director charged the Outreach Unit with heading the project and leading its planning. Two additional library colleagues were selected to participate in the planning process, with the five-person team consisting of the library director, outreach librarian, outreach assistant, user experience librarian, and administrative specialist.

As the top library administrator, the library director serves as the public face of the library and has direct contact with donors. While not an active member of the planning process, he was included on the team in order to stay informed, help the team navigate university systems, and to leverage the public facing role of director by serving as the figurehead of the campaign once it went live. The outreach librarian and outreach assistant serve as the marketing and branding arm of the library and were essential in organizing and executing the eventual crowdfunding plan. This unit is also the most familiar with the best modes of communication for each sector of the university population. The user experience Librarian was selected due to her knowledge of student needs based on previous user testing and to help lead student-centered and data driven decision making. Lastly, the library's administrative specialist was included as the budget and purchasing authority who would help navigate university purchasing requirements and would be the one to eventually spend the funds raised. However, it is important to note that while some of this team was previously tasked with fundraising duties via traditional solicitations, no team member has formal fundraising training or certifications.

In addition to library personnel, the team worked closely with the UWL Foundation, specifically the major gifts specialist who served in an advisory role when it came to making decisions throughout the campaign. This partnership also gave the crowdfunding team access to massive alumni email lists, an otherwise unavailable means of communication, and added a layer of familiarity and trust when reaching out to potential donors, both of which are factors that research emphasizes are key to campaign success (Bushong et al., 2018). In addition to offering fundraising expertise, the foundation provided the university licensed software "ScaleFunder," a crowdfunding platform for higher education, which removed the need to research other fundraising platforms as well as helped the committee tap into the existing "trust [donors] already have for the institution" (Harrison, 2018, p. 314). This relationship with the Foundation also eliminated any issues relating to tax concerns because the UWL Foundation is a tax-exempt public charity under Section 501 (c)(3) of the IRS code.

## **Identifying Student Needs**

After the planning team was formed, they worked to determine what project to fund. While the original idea was to help offset the recently reduced physical collections

budget, the team ultimately decided to fund items to improve the library's physical space, which had not been updated due to prior budget restrictions. With a building constructed in 1968, the team chose to address aging furniture as well as a lack of outlets and other resources and supplies that better accommodate the needs of today's students.

The team developed a tiered approach in order to raise their total goal of \$8,500, with each tier allowing for the purchase of a different, predetermined study space solution. The tiers were as follows:

- Goal 1: \$500 – Whiteboard markers and eraser kits
- Goal 2: \$1000 – Tabletop power outlet hubs
- Goal 3: \$2000 – Four rolling whiteboards
- Goal 4: \$3000 – Three bean bags
- Goal 5: \$5500 – Work pod chair
- Goal 6: \$8500 – A second work pod chair
- Any funds above the top goal or in-between goals will be used to purchase additional lower goal items

These goals were built directly into the marketing timeline, making it easier to draft emails and social media messaging ahead of time while still leaving room for adaptation. This tiered system also acted as an overall structure to work within during the course of the campaign to encourage donors to help the library meet each goal.

## **Donor Audience**

After determining the fundraising goal, the next step was to decide on a donor audience. The team hoped to primarily target university alumni as well as current and past faculty and staff by tapping into the nostalgia and memories alumni have of the mostly unchanged library space. Although the campaign goal was to improve study spaces for current students, the team intentionally chose not to target students as donors, even though crowdfunding relies heavily on small donations. The team felt it would be inappropriate to ask students to donate, in large part because they already were paying tuition. However, the team still wanted to engage with students and, instead of asking them to donate, encouraged them to share the campaign with their friends and family (Cho et al., 2019; Freeland et al., 2015; Diaz Vidal & Pittz, 2019).



## **Building a Comprehensive Timeline**

As with any large-scale project, crowdfunding campaigns require organizing many moving pieces while still allowing enough flexibility to capitalize on or address any changes in the direction of the campaign. The planning committee chose to use a day-by-day, comprehensive timeline model (see Appendix A). The timeline was shared with all members of the planning committee and covered an approximately five-month period including before, during, and after the campaign. Starting in September of 2021 and going until mid-February 2022, this document outlined all the campaign's communication, marketing, and logistical tasks. These tasks were assigned a date, day of the week, method of delivery (e.g., shared on the library's Instagram, posted to the library's blog), what the specific action was (e.g. ScaleFunder website goes live, student testimonials), and who was assigned to complete the task.

## **Developing the Message**

Since the planning team settled on revitalizing and updating study spaces, the messaging needed to clearly state what the library's spaces were like currently while also communicating what they would become at the end of this campaign to justify why the library was soliciting donations. Similarly, because alumni were the target audience, it was crucial that messaging utilize inclusive-gain phrasing and use campus touchstones to create a strong feeling of community in potential donors (Yilmaz & Blackburn, 2020). For example, "You can help us provide current and future UWL students with essential learning tools to help them fly like an Eagle!" uses the inclusive language "you" and "us" paired with the gain language of "provide current and future UWL students." This phrasing communicates feelings of connection and inclusion to donors as well as provides a positive outcome as a result of the donation.

The planning team determined that the campaign would be conducted almost exclusively through digital communication platforms such as social media and email. This dictated that the marketing needed a catchy hook and shareable quality to attract donors' attention. The team decided to use a concise, slightly self-deprecating, and humorous tone to voice the campaign. The campaign's title, "Fresh out of 1968," embodies this. Murphy Library was built in 1968, and while there was an addition to the north side of the building in the late 1990s, this included no new furniture or space

augmentations for other parts of the building. Since then, the facility has received only minor cosmetic updates. The crowdfunding team decided to embrace the flaws of the space and use them to clearly outline the need for funds to make improvements. By using the aging space as a starting point, campaign messaging could also make use of varying campus experiences and memories that tied our audience to the space, such as long nights studying, meeting groups in the library, or writing research papers (see Appendix B). Through the use of inclusive-gain phrased pleas, the campaign further cultivated feelings of belonging, community, and future advancement to the audience's alma mater without the perceived guilt, obligation, or negativity inherent to loss-exclusive phrasing. Finally, the selected tone allowed for a more personal, light, sarcastic, and humorous flavor that fit well on social media platforms and could also be formalized for more professional communications like email (see Appendix C). Some examples of the messaging that was produced in this tone include:

*"Remember those old, uncomfortable green and purple chairs you used to study in? Don't worry, they're still here!"*

*"Since our electrical system was built in 1968, the builders could never have dreamed how technologically entwined the college experience would become!"*

*"It's okay, we get it - social media, cat memes, and YouTube are great. Give a gift of \$50 and we'll just forget all the time you spent browsing Facebook and Instagram while you were 'studying'."*

## **Marketing and Branding**

Considering the goals of the campaign, the intended audience, and messaging tone, the planning team chose to create a very specific and identifiable visual brand for the campaign. In order to align these brand needs, the outreach assistant chose to use a mix of vibrant '60s-inspired colors, bold text and image combinations, archival and recreated photos of the library and campus, as well as contemporary photographs to reinforce the themes of aging facilities, dated furniture, nostalgia, and campus community (Figure 1). This helped establish a "shared culture" for the campaign's audience, one of many elements of a successful campaign (Josefy et al., 2017). By using an identifiable visual brand, the campaign marketing was easily recognizable across different platforms, presenting a unified message (Millman, 2013). Campaign marketing

loosely alternated between image, video, and text to maintain interest in the campaign and promote sharing on social media.

**Figure 1.** Website Banner Advertising the Campaign



One of the more successful features of the campaign's marketing was the use of archival photos pulled from the library's Special Collections, which showed how little the library has changed through the years. Photos of the space dating back to the 1950s all the way through to the 2000s were used at multiple points in the campaign. These images appeared alone with a catchy phrase or as a gallery showing the same corner of the library through the decades (Figure 2). This use of a "before and after," or more accurately "before and still the same," matched the campaign's overall tone. These images were sprinkled over different platforms at various points in the process to maintain interest and reward people for following along with the project.

**Figure 2.** Example of Using Archival Photos



*Left: Archival photo showing furniture in Murphy Library in the 1970s. Right: Photo taken for the campaign recreating the archival photo.*

Similarly, the planning team also produced a [series of videos](#) to further promote the fundraising effort. While one might think the videos should have been carefully produced and polished, the planning team decided to keep all filming efforts low-tech and minimal. This decision was not only a product of limited time and resources, but also aligned with the campaign's overall tone. The videos contained references to dated

pop culture, sarcastic librarian jokes, gibes at the old library furniture, and cameos from a few library personnel. These videos celebrated successes throughout the campaign, and although they were somewhat amateur, research suggests these “can be much more compelling than slick and polished ones for this sort of campaign, but they do still take time and creativity” (Bushong et al., 2018, p. 314). The planning team agreed that creating these videos was one of the more fun aspects of the campaign, but they did take a lot of creative effort to pull off. The effort was worthwhile, however, because the team saw a direct correlation between when these videos were posted on social media and spikes in campaign engagement on those platforms. For instance, the final campaign video reached 386 people, had 59 engagements, and 3 shares on Facebook, whereas photo-based posts on the same platform received 60-80 views and 10-20 engagements.

## **Execution**

Once the marketing plan was fully developed, it was time to launch the campaign. It began with a soft launch to current and past Murphy Library donors, who were emailed directly by the library director; the public launch happened two weeks later. Including the soft launch, the campaign spanned a six-week period, during which time the planning team continuously sent email updates, posted to social media, created videos, and updated the ScaleFunder web page. Although a detailed marketing timeline had been created, the team learned that they needed to adapt messaging quickly as goals were met faster than anticipated. This often meant that previously developed messaging needed to be changed or scrapped entirely to keep messaging as up to date as possible.

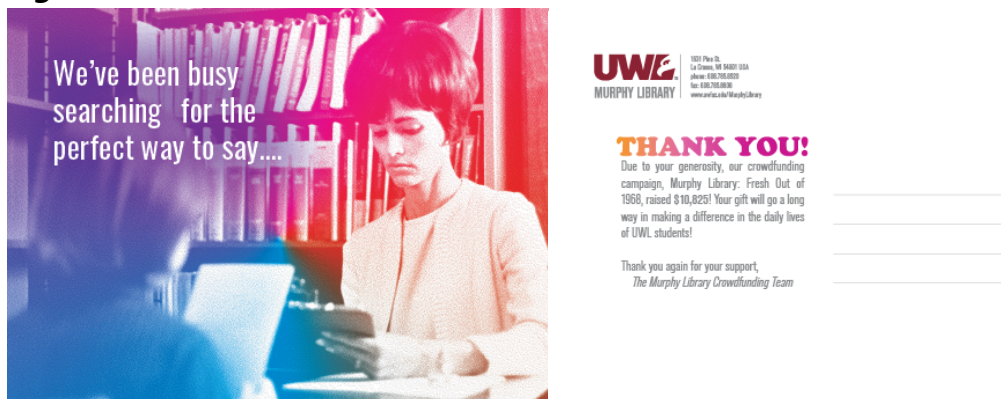
About two and a half weeks before the end of the campaign, the library received an unexpected, anonymous donation of \$2,500, officially meeting the \$8,500 campaign goal. This was an exciting milestone, but the team was careful not to let this slow down the campaign’s momentum. Instead, they capitalized on this donation by using it to encourage donors to continue supporting the campaign to see how far they could make it past the original goal. In the end, the campaign was 127% funded, with a total of \$10,825 raised.

## **Stewardship**

The final step of any well-organized crowdfunding campaign is stewardship. The crowdfunding team at Murphy Library made a concerted effort to express gratitude to donors throughout the entire fundraising process, and targeted thank you emails were sent immediately after donations were made (Wenting et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2021; Liu & Hao, 2017) (see Appendix D). More general messages in the form of video and image galleries were distributed via social media and mass email as each goal was reached. When it came to crafting these messages, the team was sure to connect them with previously created promotional methods, utilizing similar language and design elements (Bushong et al., 2018).

Counter to common fundraising practice, which promotes using a variety of incentives and rewards based on donation size (Riley-Huff et al., 2016), the planning team chose a thank you model that focused on gift-based rewards for only the largest donations. All donors received thank you emails regardless of donation size. Middle and top tier donors also received postcards (Figure 3), and top tier donors received a copy of a local history book featuring images from the library archives that were on hand from a previous fundraising effort. When receiving these gifts, donors were made aware that no additional funds were expended to cover their cost (Newman & Shen, 2012). This strategy allowed for about 99% of the funds raised to be spent on the campaign's goal items instead of on stewardship efforts, increasing the impact of each donation. Additionally, because these gifts were not advertised as a way to incentivize donations, the crowdfunding team did not have to worry about adhering to charitable gaming or raffle laws.

**Figure 3.** Front and Back of Printed Postcards Sent to All Donors



The team also sent updates to donors after the campaign ended, with plans to notify donors as purchased items were received. Although literature states the



importance of reaching out to donors approximately six months after the end of a campaign (Bushong et al., 2018), university purchasing restrictions along with the COVID-19 pandemic caused delays in the library's ability to receive items as quickly as hoped. Once items arrive, the team plans to release another round of publicity focused on the impact of the campaign.

## Evaluation

### Donor Demographics

**Figure 4.** Donation by Source Population

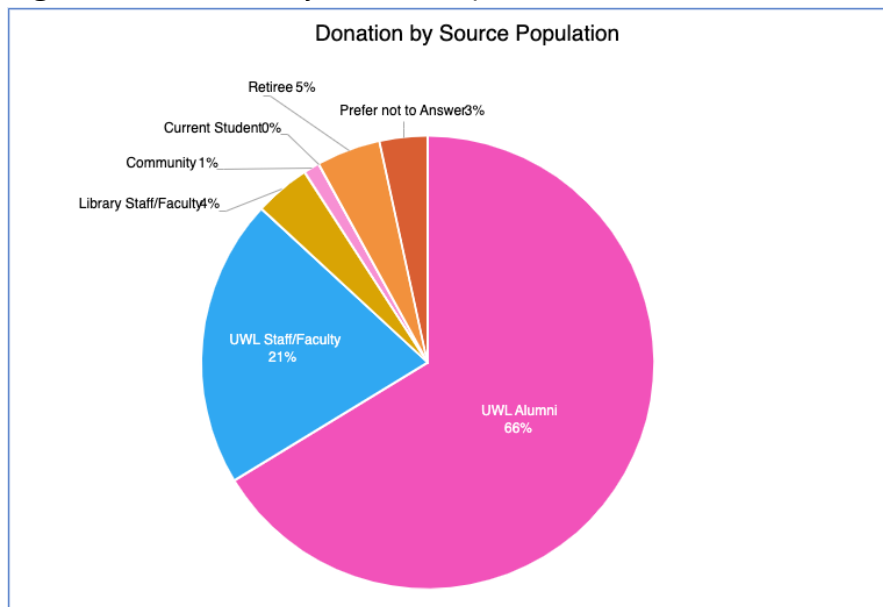
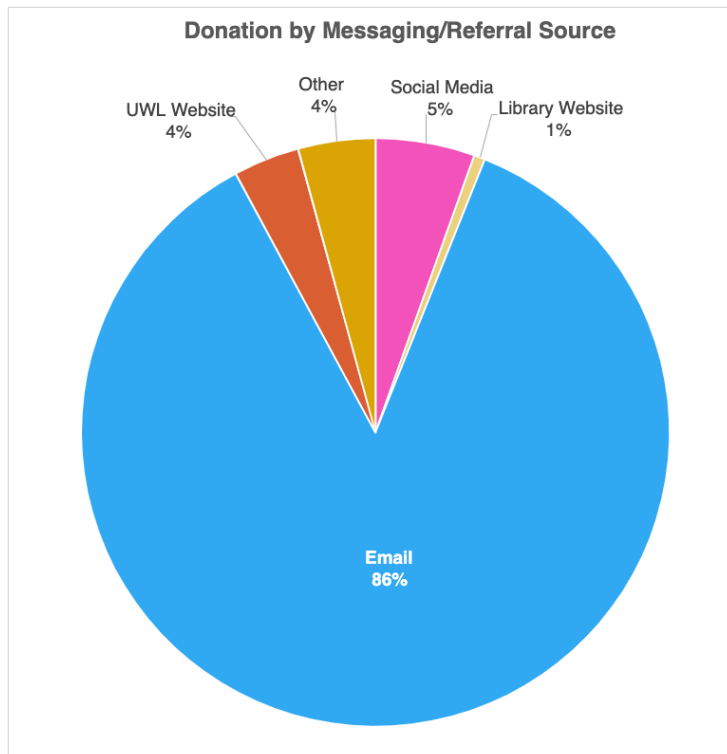


Figure 4 outlines the campaign donor identities collected during the campaign. While previous research showed "[t]he largest number of donors came from the inner circle of the crowdfunding team: the organization's employees, known supporter base groups, users and visitors," that did not entirely apply in this case (Riley-Huff et al., 2016, p. 76). Donors self-selected the UWL identity that best reflected their experiences, resulting in 4% of donors identifying as more than one category. Of the 169 total donors, a wide majority were alumni. This was expected, as alumni were the intended audience. New donors totaled 158, with only 11 prior donors contributing to the campaign, demonstrating a 93% new-donor increase. While alumni were the target audience, the crowdfunding team was pleasantly surprised that library staff participated at a higher level than ever before. Of the 22 library staff members, nine donated to the campaign with only four previously contributing to library funds. This led to 41% of library staff donating, which is a 56% increase in participation. Regarding messaging, the planning team stressed to library personnel that the most important way to participate

in the campaign was sharing information with friends and family rather than direct donations. Literature encourages leveraging contacts in this way to increase the campaign's reach even further (Bushong et al., 2018). For example, one staff member did not personally donate; however, by sharing the campaign via social media, six people donated in her name, bringing in \$185.

### Promoting the Campaign

**Figure 5.** Donation by Messaging/Referral Source



The crowdfunding campaign's donor solicitations began with email lists provided by the UWL Foundation, leading to an initial email directly from the library to donors outlining the campaign's goals in addition to soliciting funds. As the campaign progressed, significant effort was put into frequent social media updates and communications. However, the crowdfunding team was surprised to find that social media messaging accounted for only 5% of all donors in comparison to the 86% of donors who heard about the campaign via email (Figure 5). This is especially important to note, as most crowdfunding campaigns are billed as being successful due to widespread sharing. However, this relies on a campaign's ability to capture the attention of someone with a wide social media reach. In comparison, much of traditional library fundraising is done via direct solicitations such as letters and email (Bushong et al., 2018). Therefore, the dual messaging strategy utilized by this campaign was helpful:

much of the promotional content was designed for social media distribution, but campaign videos and overall brand messaging were shared via email as well.

An overlooked detail the team wished they had captured when collecting demographic information was donor age groups in relation to their preferred communication style. For example, while a majority of donors heard of the campaign through email solicitations, the team wondered if the campaign would have benefited from also requesting donors to follow the library on social media or asking what social media platforms they subscribe to. Other campaigns might consider collecting this information to get a better picture of which communication styles will best reach each age group. In addition, the campaign could have benefitted from also requesting donors to follow the library on social media to reach them better in the future, whether for future campaigns or to keep them up to date on library resources, events, and services.

### **Campus Partnerships**

Working with the UWL Foundation to gain access to alumni email lists and ScaleFunder was pivotal to this campaign's success. However, the Foundation's ability to reach such a large donor pool could have provided additional impact and social media leverage. The planning team would have found it helpful if the Foundation would have had a more active role in distributing campaign messaging via social media since the viewership of the university's social media platforms is significantly higher than the library's. This could have been as simple as mirroring the launch messaging and posting a reminder message right before the campaign closed. This is especially significant since the Foundation received a 5% commission of the overall donations. Therefore, additional social media help provided by the Foundation would have been mutually beneficial, possibly resulting in increased funds raised for the campaign overall and adding to the 5% taken by the Foundation.

Another campus partnership that could have been better utilized was between the campaign and the course ENG 307: Writing for Management, Public Relations and the Professions. After learning about the library's intention to launch this campaign, an instructor on campus reached out to the planning committee to offer assistance from the students in his ENG 307 course. The outreach librarian and outreach assistant met with this class on several occasions, and student groups provided the crowdfunding team with drafts of social media posts, donor emails, and thank you messages, several



of which were used during the campaign. However, because the planning team and English class did not partner until just after the campaign launched, many of these messages were no longer applicable due to the pace at which the campaign moved. The team thought it would be worthwhile to revisit this idea if the library launched a future crowdfunding campaign to provide a more impactful student voice, but it would require partnering with a class much earlier in the planning process.

## **Planning Logistics**

Due to the success of the crowdfunding campaign, there were some unexpected issues that arose, primarily relating to the completion of campaign video materials and the utilization of funds raised. The planning team allocated about a week between each campaign video update, but these videos were routinely out-prioritized by the team's other daily tasks. Also, the video scripts and ideas planned since the beginning of the campaign needed to be edited on the fly as the campaign outpaced original expectations. To produce the videos and still have them reflect the status of the campaign, organizers eventually chose a less polished and more comedic look and tone for the videos. While this was not in line with the original plans, the shift in style led to the videos feeling more authentic and personal, enhancing the relationships they created with donors.

By far the largest logistical issue the crowdfunding project faced was expending the funds raised. During the planning phase, the committee received quotes for many of the goal items and required installation labor. As part of a state institution, Murphy Library was limited to specific vendors to purchase goal items and needed to move through the often complicated and lengthy process of approving purchases through the appropriate channels. Unfortunately, due to the time that passed between the planning stage, the completion of the campaign, and when the funds were made available for use, many of the quotes for goal items had expired. When new quotes were requested, prices for many items had risen significantly. While having to request new quotes and seeing changes in price are common in long-term fundraising projects, the supply chain issues, increased material costs, and inflation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic severely exacerbated these price changes. All the campaign's goal items could still be purchased, but only in a smaller quantity and at a much later delivery date. For example, the team originally planned to purchase three large, walled chairs; by the time the chairs

were purchased, the price had risen approximately 45%, meaning only two chairs could be purchased. With potential cost increases in mind, institutions considering a crowdfunding project may want to ask for extended quotes or more permanent purchasing agreements from suppliers.

## Conclusion

Fundraising and libraries often go hand in hand; however, the time commitment, enthusiasm, and resources needed to do the job well can be overwhelming. In this case study, Murphy Library supplemented the library's traditional donation streams with a crowdfunding campaign to improve student study spaces. With careful planning and room for mistakes; clear campaign brand, messaging, and communication streams; and a willingness to have fun; the crowdfunding team successfully surpassed its fundraising goals. In looking back at the experience, many lessons were learned. Specifically, future research could more closely examine the relationships between library and donor-initiated campaign sharing behaviors, donation returns, and donor preferred communication styles, thus providing richer information about successful crowdfunding strategies and libraries.

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## About the Authors

**Amber Leibundgut-Peterson (she/her/hers)** is an Assistant Professor and the Web and User Experience Librarian at Murphy Library at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Leibundgut-Peterson oversees the library website and inclusive space efforts, which includes designing, updating, and simplifying our online content to breathing more life into the library via student paintings, an engagement whiteboard with weekly questions, or visualizing space usage for future student needs. She also teaches library sessions for the humanities with some of her favorite departments including English, Sociology, Psychology, and Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Leibundgut-Peterson holds an MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a BS in Sociology and Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

**Marc Manke (he/him/his)** is an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Manke has worked in higher education and academic library settings for the past 11 years in varied roles supporting marketing, communications, instruction, and event logistics. Trained as an artist and designer, Manke specializes in brand design, visual literacy, infographic design and how those visuals interface in

educational settings. Manke received an MFA in Studio Art from the Maine College of Art and Design and a BFA in Sculpture from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

**Chelsea Wyman-Green (she/her/hers)** is an Assistant Professor and Outreach Librarian at Murphy Library at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. In her current role, she oversees library outreach and marketing efforts, which range from serving as editor of the library's biannual newsletter, organizing events, managing the library's social media accounts, and more. She also serves as instructional liaison to the UWL School of Business Administration. Wyman-Green holds an MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a BA in English and Religion from Luther College.

## Appendix A

### Communications Timeline

Date	Day	Method	Actions	Assigned to
<b>October</b>				
9	Saturday	GIVING WEBISTE	Giving website goes live	
10	Sunday			
11	Monday	LIBRARY EMAIL	Soft Launch to current and past Library endowment donors (email from Library Director with letter and info)	
12	Tuesday			
13	Wednesday	FOUNDATION EMAIL	Public Launch to Alumni (first foundation email to alumni)	

			between 1969 - current)	
		LIBRARY EMAIL	Message to Current Faculty, Staff (excluding current/past within 5 yr. endowment donors)	
		SOCIAL	VIDEO 1, Public Launch to Campus Community, Alumni, and general public (first foundation to alumni between 1969 - current)	
		LIBRARY WEBSITE	Banner and link to giving site - goal status graphic	
		BLOG	Public Launch to Campus Community, Alumni, and general public (first foundation to alumni between 1969 - current)	

14	Thursday	SOCIAL	Goal 1 - Highlight Whiteboard markers/erasers kits/conversion	
15	Friday	SOCIAL	VIDEO 2 - 1969 spoof	
16	Saturday	SOCIAL	TBT - Photos	
17	Sunday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic	
18	Monday			
19	Tuesday	FIRST MEETING WITH ENG COURSE		
20	Wednesday	LIBRARY EMAIL	Message to Donors thus far from 10/11 - 10/18 Thank you and please share	
		SOCIAL	Update and donor spotlight, Alumni (WHY DO YOU DONATE?)	
		LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic	
21	Thursday	SOCIAL	Goal 2 - Highlight	

			Tabletop power outlets	
22	Friday	SOCIAL	VIDEO 3	
23	Saturday	SOCIAL	TBT - Photos	
			Update and donor spotlight, student (WHY DO YOU DONATE?)	
24	Sunday	SOCIAL		
25	Monday			
26	Tuesday			
			Message to Donors thus far from 10/19 - 10/25 Thank you and please share	
27	Wednesday	LIBRARY EMAIL		
		SOCIAL	Update and donor spotlight, student (WHY DO YOU DONATE?)	
		LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic	
			Goal 3 Highlight - 4 rolling Whiteboards	
28	Thursday	SOCIAL		



29	Friday	SOCIAL	Goal 4 Highlight - 3 Bean bags	
30	Saturday	SOCIAL	TBT - Photos	
31	Sunday	SOCIAL	Goal 5 Highlight - Work pod chair	
<b>November</b>				
1	Monday	LIBRARY EMAIL	Message to Donors thus far from 10/26 - 111/1 Thank you and please share	
		SOCIAL	Update and donor spotlight, student (WHY DO YOU DONATE?)	
		LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic	
2	Tuesday	SOCIAL	Goal 6 and push goals Highlight - second Work pod chair	
3	Wednesday	SOCIAL	???	
4	Thursday	FOUNDATION EMAIL	Second Foundation	

			email to alumni between 1969 - goal status and "final Countdown"	
		LIBRARY EMAIL	Second Message to Current Faculty, Staff, Students - goal status and "final Countdown"	
		SOCIAL	TBT - Photos into the final countdown 8	
		LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 8	
5	Friday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 7	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 7	
6	Saturday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 6	

		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 6	
7	Sunday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 5	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 5	
8	Monday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 4	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 4	
9	Tuesday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic and Countdown 3	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 3	
10	Wednesday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status graphic	

			and Countdown 2	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic and Countdown 2	
11	Thursday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	UPDATE Banner - goal status FINAL DAY	
		SOCIAL	UPDATE - goal status graphic FINAL DAY	
12	Friday	LIBRARY WEBSITE	THANK YOU!!!	
		LIBRARY EMAIL	THANK YOU!!!	
		SOCIAL	THANK YOU!!!	
13	Saturday			
14	Sunday			
15	Monday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
16	Tuesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
17	Wednesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
18	Thursday		PREPARE THANK YOU	

			GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
19	Friday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
20	Saturday			
21	Sunday			
22	Monday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
23	Tuesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
24	Wednesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
25	Thursday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
26	Friday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
27	Saturday			
28	Sunday			
29	Monday		PREPARE THANK YOU	

			GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
30	Tuesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
<b>December</b>				
1	Wednesday		PREPARE THANK YOU GIFTS/FOLLOW UPS	
2	Thursday	LIBRARY EMAIL	Thank you message to Level 1 donors	
		MAIL	Thank you postcards to Level 2 donors	
		MAIL	Thank you postcards and thank you gift to Level 3 donors	

**Appendix B**  
**Murphy Library's ScaleFunder Webpage**

Thanks for visiting!

*This project is now in update mode. Check back regularly to see how things are progressing.*

Murphy Library: Fresh out of 1968



\$10,825

127%  
Raised toward our \$8,500 Goal  
169 Donors

 **PROJECT HAS ENDED**  
Project ended on November 12, at 11:55 PM CST

 Project Owners



Share to Maximize IMPACT



DescriptionDonor Wall

### Murphy Library: Fresh out of 1968

Murphy Library has been a crucial hub of the UWL campus since it was built in 1968... and you can tell. We need the support of the UWL community to help improve student experiences by providing crucial study space solutions.

On average, the library sees over 600,000 visits from students, faculty, staff, and La Crosse community members. With so many students and visitors utilizing this campus center, Murphy Library is showing its age and struggling to support the rapidly changing environment of a college education—made worse by an ever-shrinking budget. Over the past decades, the library has prioritized providing high-quality resources, digital access, technology, and services; but this has left little if any, funds for our most used yet underfunded resource – our study spaces. We’ve always been there for our students, but now we need your help!

We need the support of the UWL community to help improve student experiences by providing crucial workspace solutions. This crowdfunding campaign seeks to raise \$8500 to help provide contemporary furniture, tools, and supplies to support this academic and community hub on campus.... and make us look a little less like your grandparents' living room.

#### Campaign Impact

Funds raised will be spent to improve student experiences by providing crucial study space solutions. We will purchase the following materials based on fundraising benchmarks within our campaign.

Levels Choose a giving level

\$1

Donate any Amount!

Feel free to donate as much or as little as you choose, or use the predetermined levels below!

Contribute \$1

\$5

The "Sensible studier"

You were the student that would regularly study for a few hours at a time, always chipping away at the work, so you didn't have to cram at the last minute. A donation of \$5 will help purchase daily use materials like whiteboard markers and tabletop power outlets, the most sought-after resources at Murphy Library.

Contribute \$5

- **Goal 1 \$500 – Whiteboard markers/erasers kits/tables**
  - For some reason, students love whiteboards and dry-erase boards... don't ask us why, we don't have an answer. Though every time we ask students what they want in the library they say, "more whiteboards!" So, let's give the people what they want! We will use \$500 to convert some of our old tables into dry-erase surfaces (we'll use some paint stuff to make the change, ask your chemistry friends to explain how it works) and purchase marker and eraser kits to add to our collection of loanable tools for students.

- **Goal 2 \$1000 – Tabletop power outlets/converters**
  - Since our electrical system was built in 1968, the builders could never have dreamed how technologically entwined the college experience would become! While the library still serves as a community hub and gathering place, much has changed from the late 60's... libraries today need to not only be a welcoming space but must also provide power and internet for the many devices students bring to study, write, research, and support their college experience.

Today, the library has become an obstacle course of charging cables straining to reach every available outlet. We will use \$500 to purchase power hubs that will be installed in our group study spaces and tables to help keep students charged and connected during those long hours of studying.

- **Goal 3 \$2000 – 4 Rolling whiteboards**
  - Ok, so we can't overstate how often students tell us they want more whiteboards.... like, every time we buy more they say we still need more. EVERY. SINGLE. TIME. In addition to converting tables and buying kits, we will spend \$1000 to buy 4 rolling whiteboards; hopefully, that will satiate the mob.
- **Goal 4 \$3000 – 3 Bean bags**
  - Students regularly spend entire days at the library, studying from the moment we open until when we close. While we believe libraries are key to academic success, we also believe naps are a required component of a balanced academic life. How do we provide students with furniture that facilitates both quality learning and comfortable sleep you ask? Well, look no further than the quintessential dorm room staple - the bean bag chair. We will spend \$1000 of our funds raised to purchase industrial strength bean bag chairs that will support the most studious of pupils and the deepest of sleepers.
- **Goal 5 \$5500 – Work pod chair**
  - We're not just thinking about our extroverted studiers - we also want to care for our introverted pals too! While developing and improving the group spaces we also want to provide some more secluded and comfortable options for those students who need to block out the world and hunker down. We will purchase a new "pod" style working chair that lets students study in seclusion for those times when they have to leave their dorm rooms!
- **Goal 6 \$8500 – Another work pod chair**
  - Unlike your first post-college apartment, we are going to try and at least have some matching furniture. For our final goal, we will purchase another "pod" style working chair to compliment our first. We have to look at least a little classy when our friends visit...
- **Any funds above our goal or in-between goals will be used to purchase additional goal items!**

**\$10**

The "Study groupie"

You were the student that could only study effectively with a group of friends – whether that actually lead to good study habits, meh, we don't know. A gift of up to \$10 will support those group study sessions with electrical hubs for everyone's laptops and rolling whiteboards to write out all your notes longhand.

Contribute \$10

**\$25**

The "Lone academic"

You were the student that started studying early in the morning – in the solitude of the wee hours of the morn, claiming your spot for the day, you would work away and before you knew it – the day was over. A gift of \$25 will support those introverted, lone wolf studiers by providing a little bit of everything to help study all day: whiteboard markers to write out formulas, a charging station, a bean bag for a quick nap, or a pod chair to block out the world and really focus.

Contribute \$25

**\$50**

The "Social media studier"

You are the type of student that was always good at making it look like you were busy studying, but you can't fool a librarian. It's okay, we get it - social media, cat memes, and YouTube are great. Give a gift of \$50 and, well, just forget all the time you spent browsing Facebook and Instagram while you were "studying". Yeah, we are resorting to blackmail now. A gift at this level will help future generations of students pass the time updating their Instagram story, watching endless TikTok's, and still have plenty of battery life to crank out that final paper with tabletop power strips and charging stations.

Contribute \$50

**\$100**

The "Pull an all-nighter"


You were the student that, for whatever reason, thought it was a good idea to save all the work and studying for the night before the test....Ya know, so it's fresh in your mind or something. A gift of \$100 or more is an excellent way to support the purchase of new furniture that will help students really hunker down and study for those last-minute, long-haul cram sessions.

Contribute \$100




## Appendix C

### Campaign Launch Email

**Murphy Library**

#### Murphy Library: Fresh Out of 1968



Dear UWL colleagues,

Murphy Library has been proudly serving students at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse for over 50 years...but we are starting to show our age. Without a budget increase in over 20 years, the library has prioritized providing high quality resources, technology, and services to our campus community. This has left little, if any, funds for our most used yet underfunded resource – our study spaces. From furniture that has lived here since our doors opened in 1968, to a lack of power outlets in our study spaces, the library is in need of a refresh. In response, we are trying something new. Murphy Library has launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds and purchase resources like furniture and power hubs that will better address the technological and collaborative needs of today's UWL student. This is where you can help!

By [donating to our crowdfunding campaign](#), you can help us provide current and future UWL students with essential learning tools to help them fly like an Eagle! If you're able, we would love if you could make a donation of \$10.00, although donations of any size will have a great impact! Even if you are unable to donate, you can still support this fundraising effort by sharing our crowdfunding website with your friends and family on your social media channels. Your support is crucial to our efforts to better serve our students.

Thank you in advance for your contribution. Your donation will go toward the purchase of contemporary furniture, tools, and supplies to help our students succeed.

Here are the ways you can donate:

- Make a donation online at [eaglesgive.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary2021](https://eaglesgive.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary2021)
- or contact Jenna Ives at the UWL Foundation to donate by phone or check ([jives@uwlax.edu](mailto:jives@uwlax.edu) or 608-785-5489)

Thank you for your support,  
John Jax  
Murphy Library Director

P.S. Watch our crowdfunding launch video [here](#).

**Donate now!**


Unsubscribe (not available for @uwlax.edu email addresses)


Developed by iComm

University Marketing & Communications, your go-to communications resource for advancing UW-La Crosse.

## Appendix D

### Thank You Email

**Murphy Library**



Thank you so much for donating to our recent crowdfunding campaign, [Murphy Library: Fresh Out of 1968!](#)

Due to your generosity, we were able to raise \$10,825, completely surpassing all our initial expectations. We will soon begin purchasing a variety of study space solutions that will better address the technological and collaborative needs of our present-day students at UW-La Crosse. We could not have done this without your support!

If you haven't already, please follow us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#)) for progress updates. We look forward to sharing the impact of your gift once everything is purchased and installed.

Again, our many thanks go out to you for helping us make a difference in the daily lives of our students at UWL!

With gratitude,

The Murphy Library Crowdfunding Team  
John Jax – Murphy Library Director  
Marc Manke – Public Services Library Assistant  
Chelsea Wyman – Outreach Librarian  
Amber Leibundgut-Peterson – Web & User Experience Librarian  
Ingrid Iverson – Administrative Specialist

**Visit our website**  
[uwla.edu/murphylibrary](http://uwla.edu/murphylibrary)



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