
Tips from Sir Cluckerton: Effective and Fun Social Media

with a Library Mascot

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Abstract: In 2021, the Houston Cole Library (HCL) at Jacksonville State University (Jacksonville, AL) added a mascot to enhance social media posts, and the result has been successful. HCL's simple low-cost mascot has consistently stimulated positive interactions between the library staff/faculty and students, community members and university officials. HCL's library mascot has created a cult-like following that watches and comments on his adventures. This current discussion indicates how any library can create their own mascot regardless of budget restrictions and time commitments.

Keywords: academic libraries, social media, branding, social media engagement

Introduction

The story of the Jacksonville State University's (JSU) Houston Cole Library (HCL) mascot begins in May of 2021 with a small, red amigurumi chicken, gifted to the HCL's social media manager. The chicken, crafted by the Japanese art of crochet known as amigurumi, simply appeared one day on the social media manager's desk. The first intention was to be just a desk

decoration; however, the finely crocheted creation was meant for a bigger life than just adorning an academic office. JSU's official mascot is a red gamecock named Cocky, and it makes sense that the Library could have a smaller, cuter, version of the University's mascot for library-related social media accounts. While HCL had been using the traditional social media outlets of Facebook, Instagram, and X, content on the pages had fallen into a rut. Posts were generally traditional, information-driven content that a person might see from an academic library, including Facebook posts about the newest available databases for students and reminders of weekly library hours and other services. It was often a challenge to come up with new materials for the social media pages, including materials that would entice viewers to stay on the page and browse through information. This led staff to consider the following question: How can library services be enticing to students and faculty through social media? Newly named Sir Cluckerton (see *Figure 1*), this unexpected gift suddenly presented HCL with an opportunity to not only enhance the Library's online social media presence but present a happier, more positive vibe in hopes of a more consistent online following and a lessening of library anxiety among users.

One of the biggest goals for any library's social media presence should be to better serve the community, enhance library services, and strengthen the voice and story of the institution. With this comes the value of engaging

audiences with more than just a few photos and text, which is what the HCL social media account set out to do. HCL itself is unique, as it is both the tallest academic building in Alabama, and it is also the tallest building on the JSU campus. All twelve floors are visible from anywhere a person might be on the campus. With this unique position of the library's place and stature, students, faculty, and staff alike deal with varying levels of library anxiety, navigating the facility as well as online resources in different ways while often struggling to find the confidence to do these things on their own. By bringing a friendly face to the social media platforms in the form of a library mascot, HCL has been able to find new ways to tell the Library's story to the campus, while also potentially alleviating library anxiety users may have.

Figure 1

The First Appearance of the Amigurumi Chicken



Literature Review

Library Anxiety

One goal of library promotional efforts, and an area where a library mascot may be a useful tool, is to reduce the fear and anxiety many users have when first using an academic library. Constance Mellon (1986, as cited in Harnett, 2005) came up with the term *library anxiety* to describe how anxious the students were when dealing with their libraries on campus (Harnett, 2005). Mellon (1986, p. 160) used the anthropological concept known as the ethnographic technique to explore how students navigated their anxiety within their campus libraries. In her research, Mellon (1986, p. 162) found that “75-85 percent” of the subjects described feeling anxiety going to the library for the first time, and some described a “phobia” or “nightmare” about going to the library.” Research also showed that issues of library size, material location, and overall understanding of how to navigate from place to place within a library added to these feelings. This contributes to how Reitz (2014) defines library anxiety as being muddled with confusion, fear, and frustration. These feelings are antiquated especially when students are overwhelmed about the size of a library for how to navigate it.

According to Carlile (2007), library anxiety is most common among users of academic libraries. Academic libraries are very different from public libraries and school libraries (school media centers) and can often be the first place where a person has their individual experience in a library. Where

students are often guided through a school media center and public library by a teacher or parent, academic libraries are single experiences that take place alone. Not only are the uses of each institution different but the age of the users and the intended outcomes expected from the institutions are also different. Van Kampen (2003) defined library anxiety as:

A combination of emotions experienced by many college students. It is characterized by: feeling overwhelmed by the size of the library; not understanding where to find things, or how the library is organized, a lack of confidence about how to begin working on assignments; feelings of inadequacy; hesitancy to ask for help; a lack of knowledge concerning use of the equipment needed to successfully complete the task (copy machines, microfiche readers, computers, etc.) (p. 8).

This definition brings a new perspective to the concept, as it incorporates the idea that there is a hesitancy among academic library users to ask for help. A student's experience of library anxiety can impact library interactions throughout a semester and can even lead to failure.

To lessen the impact of stress on students when it comes to library usage, Carlile (2007) encourages students to participate in library instruction or interact with a librarian. Shelmerdine (2018) adds to this by acknowledging that librarians need to guide students through the information-seeking process while keeping these issues of library anxiety in the back of their minds.

Doing so has a two-fold impact – letting the students gain the knowledge they need for a particular question but also establishing a learning environment that promotes understanding and safety.

Other researchers have shown that everything from the size of the building, the size of the collection, the major of the student, and the friendliness of the staff has a direct effect on students' well-being (Ansari, 2009; Lawless, 2011). Keeping this in mind, Jiao et al., (1996) says that libraries need to not only be attractive to students but provide a comfortable experience that is built around educating students but also making them feel welcome. Academic libraries must rethink the ways that library anxiety can be managed, both internally with staff and externally with announcements and other means of sharing the library's story (Cocker, 1993). Adding humor to library interactions, whether in person or virtual, is a great way to alleviate library anxiety among college students (Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1998). However, aside from the humor, providing interesting social media posts that provide crucial information to users (including but not limited to operating information, events, checking out books, and computer lab information) lessens library anxiety non-verbally through social media is an excellent way to reach lots of students where they are. This use of social media helps the library to be seen as a nonthreatening environment, which is meant to increase the understanding of all available information (Nieves-Whitmore, 2021).

Social Media

The main function of any social media platform is to be both social and interactive with followers, providing comments back to engage in conversation with users (Collins & Quan-Haase, 2014; Deodato, 2018; Mensah & Onyancha, 2021). Interacting with followers will have at least two beneficial outcomes: camaraderie with patrons, and recruitment of new followers (Cheng et al., 2020; Mensah & Onyancha, 2022). Additionally, the specific social media platforms that a library uses ultimately determine how audiences interact with virtual conversations (Cheng et al., 2023). Issues of platform technology accessibility, modern visual appeal, and relatability to various age groups impact the overall interaction of users. Cheng et al. (2023) explored this issue by looking specifically at how social media platforms impacted age groups of followers. They found that while all social media platforms strive to accomplish the same results, Instagram appealed more to college-aged students, while Facebook found its footing with professors and older adults. Keeping this in mind, it is valuable to consider the use of multiple social media platforms at the same time to reach the maximum level of participants.

The content of social media posts matters as well to the idea of connecting with potential and actual patrons. Many libraries tend to only post information about past and upcoming events. Sometimes libraries use social media as more of an advertising space for events and services, sharing flyers or

reminders of events, rather than engaging patrons in a more social, photo-driven series of posts. Chi (2020) discussed the use of social media platforms in libraries using Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. According to Chi (2020), libraries are sharing library news, including weekly and future events. Roos (2013) surveyed librarians from Estonia University and analyzed various social media accounts by this university and found that most topics of conversation via social media were about events, exhibitions, or books, rather than new, interactive content with users. Additionally, Sahu and Naik (2019) explored similar uses of social media with libraries and found that most of the posts, specifically for Facebook and X, were related to the promotion of events, services, and subject-specific databases. Little to no user engagement seeking feedback in the form of reshares or even comments was engaged among users. While advertising with social media is a must for a library, there needs to be a variety of posting types to be effective (Cheng et al., 2020). Furthermore, these posts should be in a tone that is light-hearted, fun, and vibrant to be remembered and seen regularly (Doney et al., 2020; Enis, 2017; Ihejirika et al., 2021; Jennings, 2012; Luo et al., 2013; Olajide & Alao, 2016).

Branding Content

Branding content within social media is important, as many times the visual stance and concept of branding can catch more attention than realized.

Coker (1993, p. 69) studied the idea of branding as anthropomorphizing products, defining the concept to be the “universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious.” For example, Hosany et al. (2013) found that anthropomorphizing the brand of *Hello Kitty* in the right ways has ultimately led to her long-lasting success. Hosany et al. (2013, pp. 56-60) theorized that when *Hello Kitty* was created in 1974 ideas of “keeping it simple,” “sustaining consumer interests,” and “harnessing technology,” had maintained the brand’s popularity for the past 50 years. Bafirinci and Cilingir (2015, p. 125) found that anthropomorphic ads “create significantly higher results than non-anthropomorphic ads regarding attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand and brand recall.” It is theorized that the modern ideas of childhood, including “an idea of fun and being carefree” is what makes cute, anthropomorphized characters like *Hello Kitty* very successful in brand marketing (Bernardini, 2013, p.129; Brown, 2010). Aggarwal and McGill (2007, p. 477) found that “products that are presented as human but lack human features are evaluated less positively than products that are presented as human and which have human-like features.”. Keeping this in mind, it’s important to understand that branding with a mascot should include specific thoughts on both a backstory and personality. When studying a successful

brand mascot, Patterson et al. (2013, p. 81) found that “adopting a literary approach can lay the groundwork for the creation of an influential anthropomorphic mascot.” Callcott and Phillips (1996, p. 76) write that “likable spokes-characters generate attention to the ad and positive feelings toward the brand that can potentially affect purchase behavior.” Further, an “energetic, talkative, warm, courteous, grateful, and happy” personality of the character is much more preferred by people rather than “dominate, assertive, manipulative, devious, suspicious, unstable, conceited, impatient, temperamental, and insulting” (Wortman & Wood, 2011, p. 523).

Other Academic Library Mascot Examples

There is little research written detailing the success, or lack of success, of mascot creation with marketing efforts for social media within academic settings. Bennett and Thompson (2016) wrote about their successful use of a stuffed penguin named Pablo at the University of Portsmouth’s campus library. Much like HCL’s use of Sir Cluckerton, Pablo engaged campus followers on social media. Pablo was a likable mascot who taught the patrons about different services and events at the library. Pablo's purpose was not only to provide "humor and empathy," but to also serve as an instruction guide between services the library provided and events the library hosted (Bennett & Thompson, 2016, p. 229). Bennett and Thompson (2016, p. 230) developed Pablo to change the perspective of library patrons, bringing on a character

mascot to be "benevolent, helpful, and concerned, yet relaxed and informal" traits academic library personnel are often viewed by students as lacking. While Bennet and Thompson (2016) admit that making a separate X feed for their mascot rather than running all of Pablo's adventures through the main library's social media account hindered some of his success, Pablo was well-received among viewers.

Case Study: Sir Cluckerton and the HCL Mascot Construction

The day the crocheted chicken arrived at the HCL facility, there was not necessarily an intention to use him in the way that he has been used throughout social media. He was cute, small, and brought out an adorable feeling in everyone who saw him. At first, he was just going to be a decorative piece beside an employee's desk. However, the opportunity to use him in a more strategic way for the Library came by happenstance. The HCL mascot began his role as "Social Media Master" on May 24, 2021, when a call was made for suggestions for a name. The materials used to turn him into the small, red amigurumi chicken, which resembles Jacksonville State University's official gamecock mascot "Cocky," consisted of a pattern, a crochet hook, about five dollars worth of yarn, and an imagination. Once finished, staff posted to the Library's social media accounts and asked for student/faculty/staff input on what to name the creation. By allowing the Library's social media followers to participate in the mascot's naming, it

encouraged buy-in and provided a user-centered experience with its creation. The idea to use the crocheted gift was not discussed with any library or university administration. It simply became a trial run at looking at effective new ways to market an already-existing service on campus, while connecting it back to the spirit of JSU's mascot. From the call for names, eleven names were suggested (including Peep, Boomer, and Scratch), and then a poll was created to vote on the most-liked name. The name "Sir Cluckerton" was the winner by a landslide. This contest helped determine his heritage, accomplishments, and a studious personality befitting a mascot of an academic library such as HCL. Additions to Sir Cluckerton's look were later made, including a monocle from a bent paper clip and piece of an old necklace and a bowler hat, crocheted by another member of the HCL staff (see Figures 2 and 3). Since 2021, Sir Cluckerton has acquired a large assortment of hats and has even been joined by other donated amigurumi friends (See Figures 4 and 5).

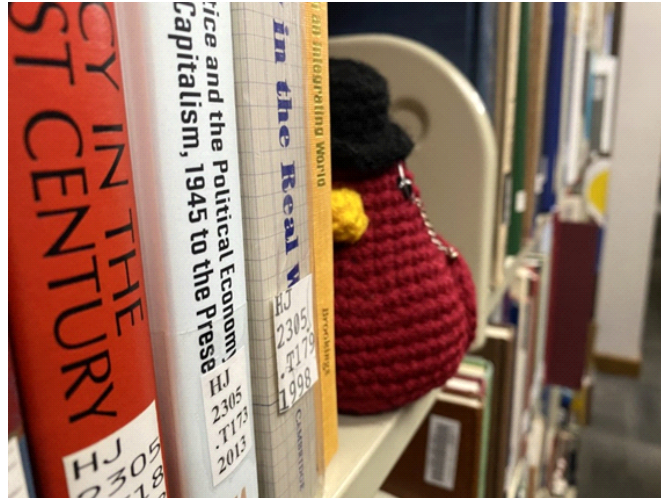


Figure 2

Sir Cluckerton in the Book Stacks

Figure 3

Sir Cluckerton Showing Patrons How To Get Online Help



Sir Cluckerton was an instant success for HCL, providing the Library with a way to connect in a new, unique fashion with all of campus and the community. In addition, Sir Cluckerton brought notice to other Library-related social media posts, bringing in views and likes that mirror many of what Sir

Cluckerton's posts have had. Before Sir Cluckerton, HCL social media posts averaged one or two likes and maybe a few interactions in the form of an emoji. Now, posts, whether Sir Cluckerton is a part of them or not, average twenty-five, and sometimes as many as, seventy likes. As seen in Table 1, one full year of using Sir Cluckerton on the Facebook platform gained an increase of over 100 percent in likes, accounts engaged, accounts reached, and overall post impressions. As seen in Table 2, when viewing similar information provided by Instagram, engagement in the form of likes increased by 28 percent for the year. Likes on Instagram were up 46 percent since the start of the HCL's Instagram page in 2016 (see Table 3). X did not allow for certain likes and engagement statistics to be collected further than one year in total. However, in the short amount of time that the platform Threads has been around, HCL's account has seen over 500 views with a gathering of 18 followers. While these numbers may seem low, they are a decedent indication of the start of a new platform's reach to a much more targeted demographic of college-aged students (see Table 4). This success has developed continued buy-in from HCL staff and faculty, including new faculty that come on board. Because of this, Sir Cluckerton's success and fame have engrained him into the culture of HCL and JSU

Table 1

Sir Cluckerton's Impact on Facebook for One Full Year

Social media platform: Facebook	1 year prior to changes (May 2020 – May 2021)	1 year after changes (May 2021 – May 2022)	Increase
Post impressions	242	4371	1706%
Accounts reached	206	3768	1729%
Accounts engaged	633	1500	137%
Likes	519	1249	141%
Number of posts made	88	198	

Table 2

Sir Cluckerton's Impact on Instagram

Social media platform: Instagram	1 year prior to changes (May 2020 – May 2021)	1 year after changes (May 2022 – May 2023)	Increase %
Likes	2,870	3,677	28%
Total number of posts	173	194	

Table 3

Sir Cluckerton's Overall Impact to HCL's Instagram Account

Instagram	Before any changes total (Jan 2016 – May 2021)	1 year after changes (May 2021 – May 2024)	Increase %
Likes	7557	11053	46%

Total number of posts 399 499

Table 4

Sir Cluckerton's Impact on Threads

Threads	Views	Likes
January 2024 – May 2024	588	18

Over time, other items were gifted to Sir Cluckerton, such as clothing items, hats, and even other amigurumi friends. He now has a sombrero, party hats, and a green top hat for St. Patrick's Day. He has friends that include a mouse, a possum, a pig from Wales, a spider, and a pumpkin gnome (Figure 4). Also, cupcake toppers have been added from time to time for a bit of added flair and whimsy at an inexpensive cost.

Figure 4

Sir Cluckerton, Friends, and Wardrobe



The simple design of Sir Cluckerton makes him a more versatile mascot. As with *Hello Kitty*, he can be happy, sad, excited, confused, or inquisitive, depending somewhat on a person's perceptions of the situations he is depicted in (Figure 5). While being small and cute is key to Sir Cluckerton's success, his ability to be transported and interchangeable in creative situations around JSU's campus and the HCL has made him an integral part of campus life.

Figure 5

Sir Cluckerton Celebrating Houston Cole Library's 50th Anniversary



Having a mascot has encouraged HCL patrons to interact with the Library online, which is an important function of social media: building positive connections. One way this has been done is by asking responsive

questions in posts using Sir Cluckerton. Perhaps he wants to know where the best place on campus is to get a quick lunch or what the best class is to take at the Student Recreation Center. Interactions like this foster community and campus engagement.

Mascot Utilization

While the HCL mascot was fantastic on his own it was necessary to utilize other forms of technology to successfully employ Sir Cluckerton's story across social media. One way this was accomplished was by using Hootsuite, a social media content management system that facilitates posting on Instagram, Facebook, and X simultaneously with a specific level of continuity. Hootsuite also allows the user to schedule posts far in advance easily and efficiently, so that the various social media feeds do not need to be constantly monitored. One drawback of using Hootsuite is that, while it does count the number of *likes* a post receives, it does not count the other possibilities of Facebook delineations, such as *love*, *care*, or *ha-ha*. Hootsuite will ignore all the other responses that followers make, and it will give the impression that only three or four "likes" were made when it was 15, for example. This issue can be important if a library relies heavily on the analytics of social media. Also, Hootsuite has a both free version and a paid version of the online software. The paid version of Hootsuite allows for more posts to be made in advance.

The other software that was used to make Sir Cluckerton look his best was Canva (Figure 6). Canva is a free online program that offers a huge database full of already-made and easy-to-use design templates. While many libraries utilize Canva for marketing purposes, numerous functions within Canva can make the user experience even better. Canva presents easy-to-modify templates, which worked great for Sir Cluckerton to make announcements and share important information for HCL, without the long-term time commitment of creating a flyer from scratch. Canva was used so much by HCL that the Library invested in the paid version, which offers more templates and faster transition between template sizes.

Figure 6

Two Social Media Posts Using Sir Cluckerton and Canva



Tips On Implementing a Library Mascot

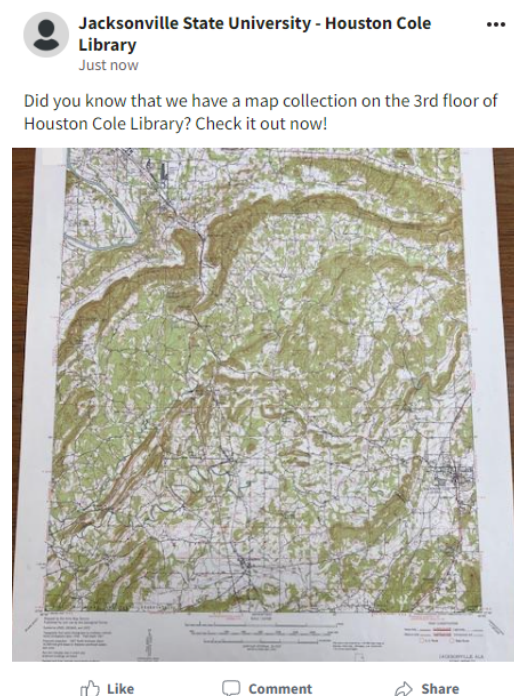
Implementing a similar program takes a little effort and creativity. However, what it takes the most of is its dedication to all facets (backstory, creations, adventures, and more) of the mascot's animated life. When coming up with a marketing campaign for social media feeds, consider how audiences will engage with the use of a mascot to tell the story. What will they remember or learn and how will they be expected to interact with the content presented (AlAwadhi & Al-Daihani, 2019; Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2007; Fraser-Arnott, 2023; Ihejirika et al., 2021; Muhammad & Zhiwei, 2021; Xin & Yingxi, 2022). Consider the following practical tips when finalizing the usage of a mascot for library social media purposes:

1. When picking a mascot for use, consider choosing one that is small, cute, and simple. Also, consider a mascot that means something to the institution, either as a play off of the overall university mascot or a creation that implements certain color schemes or slogans.
2. Remember that a library mascot does not need to be an expensive purchase. The choice of mascot can be purchased from an online venue, like Amazon or Etsy. Additionally, a staff member may have hidden talents and can create a mascot for your library. Consider ways to engage existing staff with “buy-in” for the idea and let them be part of the creation process.

3. When taking photos for social media, be willing to let creativity flow. Be sure to use a cellphone that has a good camera to take photos. Take multiple photos, and work with different angles and different places. Consider investing in a tripod or ring light that attaches to a cellphone to get started. As seen in Figure 7, library staff could have shared information about the library's map collection with simply a photo of a map and information about that map. Instead, the library staff used Sir Cluckerton and his friend to show a different perspective of the map collection, keeping the same relevant information about the maps but with a little flair.

Figure 7

Sample of Facebook Posts That Include the Same Information But Different Perspectives Using Sir Cluckerton



5. Be willing to change how the mascot is displayed throughout the social media campaign. Let the mascot have a “life” by exploring the world around them just like students would. In addition to social media posts, another place to display mascot photos is in LibGuides to advertise collections and make them more attractive to the user. Other places in the library can use the mascot friends to promote the collections. At HCL some of our subject LibGuides have added photos for pizzazz to an otherwise bland guide. Sir Cluckerton also makes many appearances on HCL’s digital signage in the building. As seen in Figure 8, another amigurumi character friend of Sir Cluckerton was used for a LibGuide.

Figure 8

Sir Cluckerton Promoting the Spanish collection in LibGuides (right)



6. Don't always reinvent the wheel of design. Choose a program to assist with the creation of flyers, such as HCL's use of Canva. Be willing to modify templates as needed. Simple is better.
7. Let the mascot wander the campus with a trusted adult. Let student workers and other librarians borrow the mascot for different photos around the library, community, and campus, to engage with areas of prime content that may have been overlooked in the past.
8. Not every post will garner the success that the creator would like. Off days of creation and traffic to a social media page happen. Just accept it, move on, and consider retrying a similar post another day. Some days, the posts the library shares will be on point. Other days the posts will not be as widely accepted or seen. It's part of the process and challenge of utilizing social media. On days that this happens, simply move on to the next posting.
9. Don't let your social media feed get stale. Don't be afraid to change what you are doing in your social media posts. Just because that is the way it has always been done doesn't mean you have to keep doing it that way. Evolve with the times or your progress will wither away.
10. Finally, have a little fun with the social media posts (Figure 9). Not everything must be serious library business. Think about what the audience will like and respond to that.

Figure 9

*Sir Cluckerton with a Starbucks Beverage Advertising an Updated HCL Café (left)
and Promoting the HCL's Archives (right)*



Conclusion

Social media is always evolving, and libraries need to evolve with it to communicate with patrons where they are currently on their journey. Libraries also need to be willing to take a chance on new forms of marketing that might not be viewed as traditional. The adage of “how we have always done it” can be a hit-or-miss experience for a social media account that needs new life breathed into it. At HCL the most popular social media feed is Instagram, then Facebook, and lastly X. Conversely, the library’s social media accounts receive the most interaction with followers on Facebook, then Instagram, and lastly X. At HCL, the way social media is approached evolves from year to year. For example, with the discussion that Twitter is now known as X, changing the trajectory of that platform and potential engagement with followers, there is a

possibility that Twitter will be dropped completely, and the newly formed platform Threads will be picked up instead.

Having a library mascot does not mean that the social media manager must use a stuffed or an amigurumi animal for branding. There are an infinite number of ways to make a mascot that would fit in with a specific library's needs. Consider this, does the library in question have access to a 3D printer? Utilize that resource and create a 3D-printed dinosaur or another creature. Does someone in the library know how to fold origami creatures? If so, consider crafting a menagerie of different things and letting those creatures tell the story. More than likely, there is a simple way to connect an inanimate object of friendly stature with whatever plan for content and branding a library may have.

At HCL, Sir Cluckerton has not only had numerous adventures but a very good reception by the entire campus, which has allowed his "story" to develop into a labor of love from a fellow library specialist on staff to create his friends and ensembles (see Figure 4). His mascot duties have expanded into various library signage, LibGuides, and other subject guides. What is next for Sir Cluckerton? He may prioritize travel to other libraries or different states. He may take a picture of himself at a national park to promote government documents at HCL. He may also visit the campus dining facility to share his experience eating one of the JSU dining hall's famous holiday-themed meals

or enjoying his favorite coffee drink (see Figure 9). There is no telling what may happen to Sir Cluckerton over the next few years, but no matter what, he will have fun all the while continuing his mission of connecting the JSU campus with the collections and offerings of the HCL. For more examples, follow HCL at: <https://www.instagram.com/jsulibrary>.

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