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# Recruitment: A role for the academic library?

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## *Creating a good impression for visiting high school students.*

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Academic libraries that allow access by the general public are used extensively by high school students—often as their primary library and regularly as a supplementary resource. Public services librarians committed to excellent library service to all patrons have difficult decisions to make regarding this user group.

Many high school students need assistance in making the transition to academic libraries.<sup>1</sup> Divided card catalogs, Library of Congress call numbers, multi-floor facilities, and varieties of information formats all serve as barriers to the uninitiated. Secondary school patrons are often unwilling to seek assistance, and they leave the library and the campus without needed, and easily available, resources.

Nor are high school students who visit libraries with their classes guaranteed a positive experience. High school classes present themselves—frequently unannounced—at an academic library to do research. Awed by the size and scope of an academic library and often unsure as to how to proceed, the students do not necessarily make productive use of their time. Unless accompanying teachers are particularly knowledgeable, or reference staff inter-

cede, high school students can leave with a negative impression of the library and, possibly, of the college.

Clearly, public service librarians realize that high school users need bibliographic instruction and reference assistance, but providing these services is generally not a top priority. Changes in the academic environment are creating opportunities for making library service to high school users a priority. The decrease in high school graduates has resulted in a dramatic increase in competition among colleges. As academic librarians, we are as conscious as our faculty or administrative colleagues of the impact of a decreasing student population. The large number of community residents who visit the library, including teachers, businessmen, and high school students, are all potential sources of new students for an academic institution. This is particularly true if these visitors' exposure to the institution through the library creates a favorable impression.

A positive library experience can reinforce positive opinions about the entire institution, as suggested by the authors of guidebooks and articles about selecting a college. "Take a good look at the library," advises *Changing Times*.<sup>2</sup> "Is it doing a brisk business, or is it nearly deserted? The library

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<sup>1</sup>Juanita W. Buddy, "Orientation to the University Library: The Missing Link," *NASSP Bulletin* 66 (1982):99-102.

<sup>2</sup>"Good Colleges That Cost Less," *Changing Times* 36 (1982):75-77.

won't be much help to you unless what's in it is appropriate for your studies and in sufficient supply."

In our library a reciprocal borrowing arrangement between the academic and public libraries has resulted in heavy use of our resources by high school students. Realizing that high school students cannot be easily distinguished from undergradu-

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## *Students get a \$1 discount coupon for their visit.*

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ates in appearance, we have focused special attention on area high school classes that visit our library.

In the past two years we have developed a structured approach to such visits. Teachers are requested to call ahead and make arrangements with the public services librarian for class visits. The assignment the students will research and the resource materials they will need are discussed, and a half-hour bibliographic instruction session with a librarian is arranged.

At the library, a librarian reviews with the students the resources and strategies needed to complete their assignments. The presentation is followed by a brief tour designed to help students locate the resources that have been discussed. The reference staff use the tour portion as an opportunity to talk with the students informally and to reinforce the idea that friendly, informed staff are available to help. The students are encouraged to ask for the person conducting the tour if they return to the library with further questions.

Thinking of library instruction as a recruiting opportunity, as well as a library service activity, has resulted in some changes in our program. Guides to the library and handouts about specific research tools are now distributed to each student in an attractive packet with general information about the college, supplied by the admissions office.

The session ends with the distribution of a "Thank You for Visiting the Library" discount coupon. Support from a campus idea fund resulted in funding to distribute these coupons to each high school student participating in a class visit to our college library. The coupon is worth a one dollar discount on a purchase in either the campus food service or the campus bookstore. To use the coupon, the student must provide his name, address, high school, and class status. Admissions staff then follow up with letters encouraging the students to consider Augustana when selecting a college.

While these embellishments may not be essential, it is exactly this kind of extra attention that

seems to make a difference in selecting a college. Sara Heckscher addresses this point in her review of the factors that influence prospective students:

"The small touches make a difference—the cordial receptionist, the cheerful atmosphere of the office, the welcoming attention to parents, the knowledge of a special student-interest, the willingness to extend a hand and help with directions, the response of a faculty member to a prospective student in the classroom. These are small efforts that added together determine whether or not a student leaves campus eager to attend that institution or turned off to further consideration."<sup>3</sup>

The results of this structured approach to hosting high school students in our library have been encouraging. The formal sessions give the librarians an opportunity to direct the classes to the resources that will be most useful as they do research in a college library. The packet provides students with general library information, as well as information about the college appropriate for prospective students. The coupons serve as a catalyst to encourage the students to see more of the campus, specifically the college commons, for a different perspective of campus life, while providing our admissions staff with names for follow-up contacts.

The experience addresses student needs. The opportunity for high school students to use an academic library with the benefit of a bibliographic instruction session has been shown to decrease the likelihood that they will be victims of "research shock" as entering freshmen, regardless of the institution they choose to attend.<sup>4</sup> Heckscher found that high school students described the ideal recruiting effort as including "good information on which to base their judgments of good institutions. They seek honesty and genuine consideration. They want to be viewed and responded to in a familiar and personal way. They want a taste of the experience that awaits them."<sup>5</sup>

Participating high school teachers and principals have been enthusiastic, corroborating Angie LeClerc's study, which found that "more than 60 percent of all teachers feel a visit to an academic library for instruction would be useful."<sup>6</sup> Most gratifying, undergraduates remind us that they first visited our college when their college prep English class came to the library.

We feel that library instruction programs for high school students have significant potential. From a recruiting perspective, they are another way for colleges to demonstrate competent, caring attention to students, one that may be especially of

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<sup>3</sup>Sarah S. Heckscher, "To Market, To Market," *Journal of College Admissions*, no.106 (1985):26-28.

<sup>4</sup>Juanita W. Buddy, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup>Sarah S. Heckscher, *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup>Angie LeClerc, "The Academic Library/High School Library Connection: Needs Assessment and Proposed Model," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 12 (1986):12-18.

interest to good students. From a library service perspective, such programs can redirect the workload of the public services staff by reducing the amount of required individualized attention to young patrons. Additionally, the subtle recruiting effort provides a rationale for excellent library service to high school users that all library employees can understand and justify to colleagues. But most important for our library, the willingness of librarians to suggest and implement this program has demonstrated to our administration that we are in-

deed "team players" and concerned about the institution as a whole.

Academic librarians need to be constantly seeking connections between the goals of excellent library service and specific goals and objectives of the institution. Making these connections will require experimentation with programs and promotion of the results. We have found that a role in recruitment, however subtle, provides this kind of connection between our library and its institution. ■■

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## Library earns high marks

By Jon Eldredge

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### *Seton Hill College wins a John Cotton Dana Public Relations special award.*

An academic library once again has demonstrated that resourcefulness and creativity are the most essential ingredients in a successful public relations program. This year the Reeves Memorial Library at Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, has won a Special Award in ALA's John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award Contest. This annual contest, sponsored jointly by the H.W. Wilson Company and the LAMA Public Relations Section, has offered recognition to libraries for their outstanding promotional programs since 1946. The contest features a John Cotton Dana Award for a superb, comprehensive annual PR program and a Special Award for a discrete aspect of an overall PR program. Seven strong entries from academic libraries competed for an award in the contest this year.

The library at Seton Hill College won this award for its role in producing a series of simple,

modestly-priced, yet attractive bookmarks. Financing the printing costs of these bookmarks represented the only significant expense involved in this project. The librarians at Seton Hill College wanted promotional materials for their user groups which would be more appropriate than those items produced commercially for other types of libraries. Many academic librarians share this concern for utilizing promotional materials that will be suitable for their users.

Seton Hill College provides an undergraduate liberal arts curriculum to its 900 students. Greensburg is a small city located 30 miles southeast of Pittsburgh in the rural foothills of the Allegheny Mountains. Like many undergraduates, the Seton Hill College students tend to possess an incomplete conception of what services a library might be able to supply. It was within this context the library wanted to promote its services. "Most of the pro-