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You mean I can use the library, too?

Collaborating with campus human resources to develop a library class for university professional and administrative staff

I believe you provide services that could benefit the entire university community.—Anonymous staff user, Spring 2010 LibQUAL Survey, UTSA Libraries

A library class for staff? No problem, we've done hundreds of those for students. How different can it be?" was our first reaction to a proposal to develop a library orientation class for university professional and administrative staff.

More remarkable than the content of the class was the process of collaborative planning, testing, and assessment between the University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA) Libraries and Human Resources Training and Development (T&D). While launching a library class for staff was the goal, the most important outcome is a productive partnership, resulting in a direct connection to HR's network of relationships and communication channels throughout the university. Library resources and services are also presented as an additional employee benefit at new employee orientation, and new hires are encouraged to attend our class.

Looking back, we would like to highlight certain steps in the process that may be beneficial to other libraries.

Background

The second largest component of the University of Texas System as of fall 2009, UTSA was established in 1969. Today it is a fast growing public university, that reached total enrollment of 30,395 in fall 2010. UTSA offers 135 degree programs, including 65 bachelor's, 49 master's, and 21 doctoral through eight colleges.[1] The total staff population of 4,007 includes 1,139 professional and 371 administrative staff.[2]

Traditionally, university administrative and professional staff have not been at the top of the UTSA Libraries' outreach list, mainly due to the concerns about taking away from the primary mission of faculty and student support. Though the library offers multiple drop-in workshops throughout the semester, few staff members are aware or take advantage of these. The Spring 2010 LibQUAL survey confirmed these perceptions, where 40 university staff (41 percent of respondents), admitted not using the UTSA Libraries enough or at all and expressed interest in learning more, specifically about online resources.

In May 2010, the T&D staff approached the library with a proposal to offer a library orientation for university professional and administrative staff. The goal was simple: to familiarize staff with library resources and services for professional and personal use. This course would be marketed to UTSA employees through the HR brochure, sent directly to all UTSA benefits-eligible employees in the fall, spring, and summer; the HR T&D Web site, along with other UTSA training courses for easy online registration; e-mail and in companion HR T&D courses; and news alerts in the monthly UTSA HR e-newsletter and departmental newsletters. The HR T&D staff classes are well-attended,

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attracting 6,428 staff members through 580 classes in spring 2010.[3]

Three librarians collaborated with T&D with a mandate to help staff discover what the library has to offer. A carefully planned, timed, and tested course with supporting materials would serve as a template so that other librarians could teach the class in the future and deliver consistent outcomes.

The overall process took five months, accommodating summer vacations and busy instruction schedules in early fall 2010, and included planning; conducting a staff survey; teaching a pilot class; assessing pilot findings and adjusting the lesson plan, activities, and timing; and, finally, confidently going live.

Planning

Initially, we decided to focus on professional and administrative staff, although the class would be open to all staff. Two classes per semester would be planned after the hectic instructional workload eases, with registration capped at 18 based on laptops in the instruction room. Two librarians would co-teach the first several classes to test-drive the content and gauge interest.

From May through July 2010, three planning sessions, where the class scope and objectives were developed, took place. Librarians work with students in one-shot sessions, however, T&D classes can be as long as several days. T&D contributed their experience working with adult learners and their expertise in developing classes with subject matter experts (SMEs) throughout the university. The SME orientation handbooks proved helpful in setting goals, objectives, and outcomes, and planning the class. T&D recommended a two-hour pilot with a select group to test timing and gather feedback. Following T&D's procedures enabled pilot class attendees to provide valuable feedback.

Our objectives were simple: to introduce staff to the library physical layout, familiarize them with the library Web site as a gateway to the 24/7 online library, find full-text articles on a topic, locate a journal, find full text from a citation, discover books/DVDs, identify relevant databases, obtain books and articles unavailable at UTSA, and request materials for purchase.

During our planning phase, we identified another avenue for reaching out to staff: updating and expanding the library component in the new employee orientation to frame library collections and services as an added employee benefit. As a result, we created an updated brochure for HR new employee orientation, and a short two-to-three minute film for staff about the UTSA Libraries is in the works.[4] Finally, we strongly felt that, to design an interesting and relevant class, we needed to know more about our audience; hence we proposed a pre-class e-mail survey of our registrants.

Survey to better understand our audience

Prior to developing the content, we designed a nonscientific survey to assess information needs and gather current usage of books, articles, and statistics; class expectations; and topic suggestions to engage class participants.

An HR staff analyst with survey design experience made several invaluable suggestions for reducing ambiguity and increasing quantifiability. T&D e-mailed the survey to a select group of 174 administrative staff representing 96 departments: 58 recipients (34 percent) responded.

The survey included nine questions: where they search for information; whether they use books, articles, and statistics and how they obtain them; whether they use the UTSA Libraries; and what they would like to learn in class. Among the respondents, 94.8 percent searched for information in the course of performing their job duties, with 50 percent doing so at least once a month. 94.8% searched the Web, 72.4 percent searched the university Web site, 19 percent used the UTSA Libraries Web site, and nearly 45 percent used professional organizations and other sources. 43.1 percent of respondents had never used the UTSA Libraries, however, there was strong interest in learning about the libraries, with 91.2 percent indicating they would like to learn where to search and which search tools to use.

Given that the library recently implemented Google Scholar and Summon, discussing the

relationships among different search tools would be essential.

Pilot class

After working with T&D to create an outline, determine learning outcomes, and survey the registrants, a pilot class was conducted. Sixteen staff attended, including four from T&D to gather feedback. The two-hour pilot began by having attendees introduce themselves and talk about their experience using the library and expectations for class outcomes.

To gather feedback, the class was divided into zones. Zone 1 was the first 55 minutes of class, and Zone 2 was the second 40 minutes. At the end of each zone, T&D asked for feedback, and evaluations were distributed at the conclusion. Questions asked during both zones were "What works?" "What needs improvement?" "What's missing?" and "Other comments?"

During this workshop, there were differences from student instruction sessions. Attendees were engaged, sought interaction with the instructors, and wanted to help guide the agenda. The level of interactivity was impressive, with the librarians facilitating discussion rather than lecturing.

Due to the high level of involvement, some topics took longer than planned, and it was decided that a three-hour class length would be preferable. T&D helped guide the decision for the title of the class. In their experience, most people mentally alphabetize when perusing a training class schedule, so staff would be looking for a library class under "L." Thus, the name "Library for Staff: Make It Work for You" was selected.

Post-pilot assessment

A final meeting with T&D was scheduled to discuss pilot results before going live. T&D provided a summary of participants' comments, which proved useful in modifying the lesson plan. The attendees made these suggestions: slow down, allow more time for hands-on exercises, expand the handout with step-by-step instructions, speak more loudly, and extend the library tour to include Special Collections and Periodicals and Microfilm.

The initial environmental scan, which took 20 minutes, was modified: attendees would introduce themselves; however, information about search experience and expectations was requested in advance. A week before the class, a questionnaire was e-mailed to registrants to ask about comfort level with Web searching, class expectations, and topics of interest. Streaming video and online music databases were topics added to the class, based on survey and pilot information.

Finally, the T&D director offered to announce the class and other library workshops in the monthly staff online newsletter.

Going live

The library class was announced in the staff online newsletter, and with T&D online registration open, the class filled with 18 registrants. Nine people responded to the pre-class questionnaire, revealing that attendees ranged from experienced legal researcher to novices uncomfortable with laptops. Suggested topics included "research compliance," "higher education retention," "financial aid for older students," and "arrowhead types for South Central Texas."

The library tour at the beginning of class was popular, and the highlight was a visit to Special Collections on the fourth floor and a brief presentation by the rare books librarian. Attendees responded enthusiastically to an invitation to make a recipe from a collection of Mexican cookbooks showcased on the blog La Cocina Historica.[5]

Class materials included a PowerPoint diagram illustrating relationships between the catalog, e-journal locator, Google Scholar, Summon, and databases. A handout included step-by-step instructions with examples, suggested exercises, and time for individual exploration.[6] The class included a ten-minute working break after 90 minutes, during which participants searched and found a book of their choice in the stacks in exchange for a prize. The lesson plan helped to keep the class on schedule and check the audience "pulse" after each step to ensure no one was lost.

Class evaluations showed that attendees rated the improvement in their skills or knowledge at 71.67 percent for the first class and 83.75 percent for the second. In both classes, participants thought that the class length was about right and indicated they would recommend the class to co-workers.

Conclusion

After teaching four live classes, we look back on our collaboration as a success, most especially because it was different from what we had initially envisioned and led us down paths previously not charted. We academic librarians teach instruction sessions for many different student populations. However, developing a class for adult learners had enough unique steps and outcomes to compel us to share our story.[7] Our collaboration resulted in:
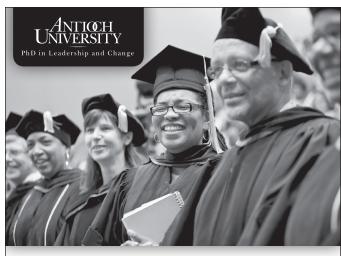
• A new partnership with T&D, revealing additional communication channels and taking library outreach to a new level.

• Acquisition of information about adult learning and the need for continuous assessment and evaluation of workshops.

• Outreach to professional and administrative staff and an increased awareness of their information needs.

• Elevation of the UTSA Libraries' profile at new employee orientation, changing the perception of library resources and services to an added employee benefit.

With minimal effect on library staffing, we have designed and tested a successful class that consistently receives high evaluations and is easily replicated by other librarians.

Notes

1. "Fast Facts," accessed January 27, 2010, http://utsa.edu/about/glance/.

2. "UTSA Fact Book," accessed January 27, 2010, http://utsa.edu/ir/FactBook.html.

3. UTSA HR T&D, e-mail message to author, January 27, 2010.

4. "UTSA Libraries Staff Brochure," http://cuteurl.info/?brochure.

5. La Cocina Historica blog, http://lacocinahistorica.wordpress.com/.

6. Workshop Handout, http://cuteurl.info/?handout.

7. Natasha Arguello and DeeAnn Green. "You Mean I Can Use the Library Too? Developing a Library Class for University Professional and Administrative Staff in Collaboration with Human Resources Training and Development." Poster Session, Association of College and Research Libraries Conference, 2011, http://cuteurl.info/?poster. ɲ