

Arianne Hartsell-Gundy, Kim Duckett, and Aaron Welborn

# #ThankALibrarian

## An engagement project to make library support more visible

*Thank you for . . .*

*“Talking with me on chat, and helping me find obscure old journal articles.”*

*“Going above and beyond to help me find sources for my research paper.”*

*“Helping me connect with my cultural history! (Rubenstein Library is AMAZING!)”*

*“Providing a safe, comfortable space.”*

These are just a few of the messages captured by a team of library staff at Duke University Libraries as part of our #ThankALibrarian campaign during the 2016 National Library Week. Across campus, library staff engaged with students, faculty, staff, and visitors who were invited to write a message of thanks on a small whiteboard and have their photo taken.

The library staff involved were overwhelmed by how happy people were to respond to our prompt: “It’s National Library Week. Would you like to thank a librarian?” The result was a week of enjoyable connection with the campus and nearly 300 messages captured and shared on social media via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The project was a collaboration between the libraries’ director of communications

and the Research and Instructional Services department’s Communications Team. Key goals were to make the contributions of Duke Library staff more visible by having users speak on our behalf, and to highlight the ways the library can help by sharing these photo testimonials.

We also wanted a way to celebrate National Library Week and to increase social media engagement with our users and supporters. Finally, by capturing thanks from our users—which is often thought, but not overtly expressed—we hoped to provide an opportunity for library staff to feel valued and appreciated.

#ThankALibrarian was created for quick yet meaningful engagement. We designed the project so that it would be light-weight for participants, visually appealing, and fun. All of these elements also made the project social media-friendly.



Duke’s #ThankALibrarian campaign was designed to be light-weight for participants, visually appealing, and fun.

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Throughout the week, pairs of librarians were stationed at target locations and worked together to connect with students, faculty, and others to explain the project and to help participants create their message on a whiteboard before taking their photo. We used signage to promote the activity and gave away library-inspired buttons. Participants were entered into a drawing to win a satirical “PBR” T-shirt promoting Perkins, Bostock, and Rubenstein libraries, the main cluster of libraries on Duke’s West Campus.

Groups of photos were shared on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter over the course of the week. We were also able to hire a professional videographer for part of the time, which allowed us to cap off the campaign with a short, upbeat video that we shared and promoted widely.

### Project logistics

Although it sounds simple, this project involved a lot of moving parts. As a result, the team developed a planning document outlining logistics, supplies, roles, and a timeline. This careful planning contributed greatly to our success.

Before starting, we got advice and permissions from a variety of places, starting with buy-in from our administration. We also consulted social media staff in Duke’s Office of News and Communications for tips on how to run a social media campaign, and we solicited feedback from our library student advisory boards. Because we planned

to collect photos of individuals and share them widely on social media, we were particularly mindful about how best to inform participants. To make this process easy, we printed and taped a disclaimer on the back of all of our whiteboards informing participants that by allowing us to take their photo, they agreed to let us share and use it online and in our video.

The team picked high-visibility locations around campus, including bus stops, the plaza outside the student center, and our library coffee

shop.

Ultimately we found that our best spots for connecting with the campus community were right in front of our libraries. Though we picked a variety of times, we emphasized times when



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we thought we would be most likely to get more people passing by, so we stayed away from early morning and tried to pay attention to class changes.

While we hoped to get plenty of participants who would want to thank our librarians, we tried to increase participation by making the process easy and by making our stations as visible as possible. We created large, eye-catching posters advertising National Library Week and the #ThankALibrarian campaign, created buttons that we gave to people walking by, and let people know that they would be entered into a drawing for one of our “PBR” shirts (helpfully worn by all of our volunteers), if they participated.

The team also developed a plan for how to capture and share our images. Our volunteers

took photos on their smartphones and then emailed the photos at the largest file size to the libraries' Communications staff. Then the photos could be curated, compiled, and uploaded to social media a couple of times a day.

### Collaboration across the libraries

Since one of our goals was to make library staff feel valued and appreciated, we knew we wanted to involve people across our libraries. As a result, we planned to set up our stations at multiple locations on both Duke's West and East Campuses. This served the dual purpose of ensuring that we would get different campus populations to participate and that we would get participation from staff across the organization. We also created paper versions of our #ThankALibrarian whiteboards that could be distributed at service points, such as the Rubenstein Library Reading Room and the Perkins Library Service Desk.

Our giveaway buttons had slogans that advertised many different libraries at Duke (e.g., "Owl See You in Rubenstein" and



Having a few prompts ready helped participants come up with more specific whiteboard messages, instead of generic statements like, "Thanks for the books."



The team picked high-visibility spots on Duke's East and West campuses, which ensured participation from different campus populations.

away participated!

Once we had our volunteers, we endeavored to make it very easy for them to partici-

ate. We created an online spreadsheet where volunteers could sign up for the times and locations that worked best for them. On this spreadsheet we asked volunteers to list their cell phone numbers, so we could stay in contact. We created a kit of materials they could use during their shifts that included a script, a checklist, and all the necessary supplies. We also had a practice meeting before the big week, so that volunteers could figure out the best

way to take pictures, learn the best way to get the photos to our team, and share tips on how to approach people. During the week,

"Music Librarians Know the Score"). Then we asked for volunteers at an all-staff open meeting and through an email to our internal email lists. We were very lucky to get librarians, library staff, and student worker volunteers from a variety of library departments. Even our Marine Lab Library located 200 miles

we regularly communicated through email about our progress and what volunteers were learning during their shifts. To sweeten the deal, each of our volunteers received one of the much-coveted “PBR” shirts to wear during their shifts and then keep.

## Impact

While our initial goal was to convince 100 people to thank a librarian, we were thrilled and overwhelmed when we got nearly 300 participants.

In general, students, faculty, staff,

and campus visitors walking near our stations were interested in participating. Often their positive feelings and thoughts about the library were generalized by statements such as “I love the library!” or “The library is great!” But with a little prompting from library staff, many people gave more specific shout-outs for how a librarian—sometimes remembered by name, a service, or space—met their needs.

The project was a big hit on social media, resulting in new followers to the Duke University Libraries on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The project reached nearly 4,000 people on our Facebook page and had an “organic reach” of 13,047 people as a result of likes, shares, tags, and comments. The Libraries Facebook page received an 8,656% increase in traffic over a typical week. The top posts featured American journalist Cokie Roberts, who was visiting campus to speak at a library event that week, and Duke University’s President Richard Brodhead. The project also led to 260 email addresses added to the Libraries News and Events email list.

Our #ThankALibrarian video<sup>1</sup> provided a short and fun overview of the project. It was shared via social media and used by the Duke University Libraries Development office as part of their spring solicitation. However, the biggest measure of exposure came when Duke’s Office of News and

Communications shared the video through the university’s top-level social media channels and posted it on the university’s homepage (duke.edu), resulting in thousands more views, likes, shares, and

reactions. The project team also presented to a large group of library staff who enjoyed learning about the project, watching the video, and viewing a sampling of the 300 photos and messages. Our goal of helping staff feel valued and appreciate was certainly achieved.

## Suggestions for other libraries

We learned several things that may be useful for anyone considering similar initiatives. First we learned the value of brainstorming. The whole idea of this project came out of the brainstorming our team was doing for projects related to making our work as librarians more visible. Our idea became stronger and more interesting the more we talked through the concept.

Related to this idea, we saw how great things can turn out when you are willing to experiment. We had no idea when this started if this idea would work out well or not. We also learned how important planning can be.

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its publications: Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board; *Choice* Editorial Board; *College & Research Libraries* Editorial Board; *College & Research Libraries News* Editorial Board; New Publications Advisory Board; Publications in Librarianship Editorial Board; *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* Editorial Board; and Resources for College Libraries Editorial Board.

Appointments to editorial boards are made after the ALA Midwinter Meeting for terms that begin immediately after the ALA Annual Conference. The editors recommend the names of individuals to fill vacancies. The Publications Coordinating Committee approves the recommendation and the ACRL vice-president/president-elect makes the appointment.

If you would like to be considered for appointment to an editorial board, contact the editor of the editorial board early in the fall or indicate your interest on the ACRL online volunteer form.

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**Resources for College Libraries chair:** Neal Baker, Earlham College Lilly Library, phone: (765) 983-1355, email: bakerne@earlham.edu. *✍*

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*(“#ThankALibrarian,” continues from page 540)*

Everything ran fairly smoothly because of all the advanced discussion and planning. On a practical note, we found that enlisting help from staff across the library was a very fruitful decision. We received great ideas from the staff involved and really benefited from the energy they brought. We also discovered that if you are going to ask the general public to do something like write on a whiteboard, having some prompts ready can lead to more specific suggestions instead of generic statements like “Thanks for the books” or “Thanks for answering my questions.”

Finally, we learned that university communications officials are always looking for well-produced social media content to share and promote. After sharing our video on the main Duke University Facebook page, Duke’s

manager for social media and digital strategy told us, “The big take-away I’ll reinforce is that great, beautiful videos will be shared on the main channels, building your reach and exposure. This was very, very well done.”

The positive reactions from the participants, the library staff who saw the video, and the general public has definitely made us eager to repeat this kind of project in the future, with perhaps different themes. We encourage other libraries to think about creating similar campaigns simply because it was so easy to do and had such a strong impact on our community.

#### **Note**

1. Duke University Libraries #ThankALibrarian video, [bit.ly/thankalibrarian](http://bit.ly/thankalibrarian). *✍*