Rachel Kray

Empowering Students Through Academic Resources

Strategies for Marketing Library Tools in a Rapidly Changing Educational Landscape

Library attendance has dropped by 50% over the past decade,[1] highlighting a significant shift in how students engage with and learn about academic resources. Academic librarians have always adapted to change, but today's pace—driven by advancements in technology and artificial intelligence—demands even quicker pivots. One key challenge is ensuring students have visibility of available tools, such as Libby or Kanopy, and can effectively use them while demonstrating responsible digital citizenship. They won't use tools if they don't know about them. Although technology has transformed the learning landscape, outreach strategies to students have largely remained stagnant.

Circumstances aren't all that different from the efforts to combat "fake news" in the mid-2010s. Librarians educated students on how to combat and vet sources while learning how to dig through a complex range of information. Since then, librarians' focus has expanded to educating students on new technologies, which is especially important since digital materials make up 98.4% of library circulation.[2]

Students often rely on a quick Google search for information, overlooking the wealth of curated, reliable resources their libraries offer. Bridging this gap requires proactive marketing to meet students where they are: on their smartphones, laptops, and digital platforms. Tools like QR codes, targeted workshops, student ambassadors, and tailored content can educate students about navigating new technologies and finding vetted information efficiently.

Promoting library resources isn't just about ensuring quick and easy access; it's about empowering students to use them effectively. By integrating outreach into student orientations, collaborating with organizations, and leveraging user-friendly technology, academic libraries will remain central to both academic and personal growth. Below are some strategies to ensure that students know about the resources that academic librarians have carefully selected and made available.

Marketing Effectively

One classic method to market resources on campus is using digital screens, printed materials, and signage across campus buildings—like the library, student center, or academic halls—to promote free access to ebooks and audiobooks. These visuals can quickly grab attention and remind students of the library's digital offerings.

It's especially impactful when marketing assets are shown at kick-off events, such as orientation, targeting new students to ensure they benefit throughout their entire college journey.

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This is important to avoid circumstances where students don't know what their school library offers until they've reached senior year.

And, to capture their attention by staying on-trend, include QR codes on marketing materials with messages like, "Confused by AI? Scan code to learn more." This offers students the opportunity to easily learn more about the latest buzzwords and can guide students from confusion and misinformation to seeking reliable, vetted information.

Another tactic, while it's more challenging to execute, is posting on social media—especially "BookTok," which is a subset of content on TikTok where users share videos about books. Academic librarians who have the resources and approval to post consistently can easily disseminate book recommendations, resources, and helpful tips through this channel.

The Ferriss Hodgett Library at Memorial University–Grenfell Campus and Musselman Library at Gettysburg College post consistently on their Tik Tok accounts, @librarygrenfell and @gburgcollibrary. The librarians use the social media platform to post about library collections, day-in-the-life content, tips for research, and general, fun content aligned with current trends. This is a great example of meeting students where they are with a variety of media platforms to share information.

Additionally, make sure faculty know what's available so they can champion and encourage students to make use of resources. Best practices include communicating with all the department heads, soliciting feedback from faculty on collections related to their coursework, and emailing visuals such as brochures and flyers.

A final, innovative approach to integrate library resources into students' daily habits is adopting campus ambassadors. The ambassadors are students who visit the library often and are encouraged to share how to use library resources with their peers. This word-of-mouth strategy causally advocates for the library and can be used to spread specific updates across campus.

Staying Relevant

A Google search is easy, but less reliable than the resources academic libraries offer. Emerging developments can help make access to academic libraries even easier, while maintaining reliability. Provide materials created by vetted publishers—industry-respected publishers—that can help students learn about these new technologies then implement those tools to help in their coursework and everyday lives.

Having credible information ready when a news event happens is getting easier as technology advances. Meet students where they are at, beyond brick-and-mortar, like smartphones and laptops. Resources need to be in the hands and on the screens of students when they need it quickly, meeting the demands for materials.

It can be daunting, but staying on top of collection updates is essential to remain relevant. Librarians' tools should be assembled into one system, saving time and effort by helping librarians avoid bouncing from resource to resource. Apps can ease the burden by helping curate collections on demand to meet the needs of students. If there is a sudden news event that occurs, librarians can immediately purchase and merchandise relevant resources.

Ensuring that this and other content are widely available is essential to helping students. Resources are available to librarians—particularly academic librarians—to promote cohesion between work with different vendors and systems while being available and discoverable.

Still, having a fluid collection, organized with the users in mind, only does so much if students don't know what's available. Get the information out early and highlight the library as not only a resource, but the holistic learning experience it offers. ✍

Notes

1. "Americans Library Visits Statistics 2022: Surprising Insights," Infographic Website, last updated November 12, 2024, https://infographicsite.com/infographic/americans-library-visits-statistics-2022/.

2. American Library Association, "The State of U.S. Academic Libraries: Findings from the ACRL 2023 Annual Survey" press release, October 3, 2024, https://www.ala.org/news/2024/10/state-us-academic-libraries-findings-acrl-2023-annual-survey.