Collaborations Across Campus: Social Justice Pop Up Libraries
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Abstract
Over the course of the fall 2018 semester, we held three pop up library events in the campus student center. Curated in collaboration with campus partners, each pop up library highlighted materials by and about people of a particular marginalized identity. These events enabled visitors to check out materials onsite and engage with library staff outside of the library setting, thereby reducing barriers to accessing information.

Why pop up libraries?
Low cost, high impact
Pop up libraries are “a simple and cost-effective way to raise the profile, enhance promotion, promote a positive image and challenge stereotypes of the library in the community...with great potential for establishing and strengthening partnerships” (Davis et al. 2015).

Hands-on engagement
There is pedagogical value in physically handling collection materials (Bahde et al. 2014), and by interacting with a display, moving items, turning pages, etc., visitors and library staff become co-creators and curators (Settoducato 2017).

Proactively celebrating diversity & inclusion
This project was inspired by bookmobile efforts at the MIT Libraries to highlight under-represented or marginalized identities. Social justice initiatives often arise in response to a negative event, so we wanted to use the library’s collections as a way to normalize ongoing positive representation for marginalized groups.

Project goals
1. Bring materials and services to our users
2. Expand the role of the library as a resource and collaborator
3. Contribute to ongoing University efforts

Building partnerships
Across campus
For the first event, we recommend partnering with an organization that you have a comfortable relationship with, since that is when many details will be worked out. We worked with the LGBT Center and Student Accessibility Services on our campus to select titles and provide informational material to give to visitors.

Within the library
Staff built skills and fostered goodwill through voluntary interdepartmental cross-training. All staff who were interested were invited to participate.

Measuring success
We tallied the number of:
- visitors who looked at the display
- visitors who talked to staff
- visitors who moved items
- items checked out
- visitors who took promotional items (“swag”).

We also wrote down anecdotes of compelling moments or feedback from visitors to provide a fuller picture of engagement, as is consistent with professional literature (for example, Farrell & Mastel, 2016).

By the numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pop Up Theme</th>
<th>Looked at display</th>
<th>Talked to staff</th>
<th>Touched items</th>
<th>Checkout</th>
<th>Took swag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Awareness</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT History</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American History</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We have found that the event is a low-cost pilot that succeeded in its first iterations, the third of which was organized by a colleague using our documentation for their own pop up libraries and we hope to see this positive momentum continue. The pop up library pilot has been a much-needed opportunity to build relationships and build collections that more fully represent our community.”

Challenges
Financial resources
While it is possible to put on a pop up library event at no cost, it helps to set aside collections funds for new materials and a book cart with locking doors to safely transport items being displayed.

Gaining administrative buy-in
Connecting the pop up library to organizational priorities and indicating potential return on investment can help increase buy-in.

Finding time
While many staff members were happy to suggest book titles and staff the table, it was harder to find folks who had the capacity to organize an event to take ownership. This is an ongoing challenge we face: while starting this initiative requires a substantial time investment, it is not sustainable for the same few people to be responsible for all pop up libraries.

Conclusion & future directions
This project was a low-cost pilot that succeeded in its first iterations, the third of which was organized by a colleague using our documentation for the first time. Documentation was integrated into the planning process from the outset to give others the resources to plan their own pop up libraries and we hope to see this positive momentum continue. The pop up library pilot has been a much-needed opportunity to build relationships and build collections that more fully represent our community.

Bring a pop up library to your school!
A full digital toolkit of our documentation is available for you to adapt at http://go.tufts.edu/PopUpToolkit

Further reading


