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Start at Step 1: Gathering Information to Gain Instructional Allies

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START AT STEP 1: GATHERING INFORMATION TO GAIN INSTRUCTIONAL ALLIES

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ABSTRACT

Laying the foundations of collaboration is the first step in engaging with faculty about instruction. We tend to open that conversation with, “Let me tell you about the library,” instead of, “Tell me about your course/students/program.” Both presenters for this interactive workshop had recently taken on new liaison areas and employed informational interview techniques to learn about these programs and build partnerships with key faculty allies, such as program directors or department heads. During the session, participants analyzed their current strategies for engaging with a target program or department. The presenters then shared their experience using informational interviews to engage with faculty and spoke about considerations for framing and conducting informational interviews.

OUTREACH ANALYSIS

We began the session by talking about taking stock of the current state of outreach. Participants worked independently to analyze outreach to a single program or department, considering which stakeholders within the unit they interact with, the means of interaction, and the frequency. (See Appendix A.) Participants were then asked to consider which outreach elements were working well, which were less successful, and what could change. Each participant was asked to share one item with the group at large. Unsurprisingly, pushed communications, such as emails and newsletters were common; as was attending department meetings.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Borrowed from career services literature, the presenters believe that informational interviews are a nice foray into understanding departmental or programmatic needs. By their nature, they aren’t systematic, are informal, and can be done as time allows by almost anyone. After actively listening to faculty stories, librarians will be able to market library instruction to instructional allies around targeted course or program needs, rather than casting a wide net for faculty engagement. Librarians could employ similar techniques to learn about other campus units, such as Student Affairs. During the session, the presenters shared a list of things to consider when conducting informational interviews, such as using open-ended questions and listening actively asking for clarification. (See Appendix B.)

CONCLUSION

The presenters used informational interviews to develop relationships within their liaison areas. Those conversations resulted in a better understanding of student pathways to degree. They also lead to tangible outcomes. Some were small, such as website updates and one page library information pages, while others resulted in new instruction and consultation opportunities. By taking the time to be curious about our users, and centering their needs, the presenters were able to build relationships.

APPENDIX A

OUTREACH ANALYSIS HANDOUT

Target Department/Program: _____

Part 1: How do you currently maintain and develop relationships? Consider the current state of these relationships, not the “right answer”. This is not an exhaustive list of stakeholders, so feel free to add your own as relevant to your program.

Stakeholder	How Do You Develop/Maintain Relationship? On what frequency?
All faculty	
Chair	
Director of Undergraduate Studies	
Instructors of courses w/ research components	
Program Coordinators	
Undergraduate advisors (if at department level)	
Graduate instructors	
Student Organization	

Part 2: Analyze Your Outreach Strategy

What parts are working? What relationships would you consider “successful”? Are you getting teaching classes in the department or program?

What parts are not working? What barriers exist to successful outreach?

What can you realistically change going forward?

APPENDIX B

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

Informational interview:

An informal conversation with a stakeholder to gather information about program requirements and student pathways (not about promoting the library)

Interviewees are the experts:

- Respect their time and contribution
 - In invitation, mention length of meeting; be aware of other time demands
- Consider inviting them to have coffee or bringing a small gift (library branded items).

How to Phrase Questions:

- Use Open-ended Questions
- Ask about one thing at a time
 - Example: What kinds of careers do students in your program pursue?
- Instead of ‘Why?’, ask ‘How so?’ or ‘Can you tell me more about that?’
- Word questions concisely
- Keep questions impartial
 - Poor question: What parts of the research process are students the worst at?
 - Better question: What questions do students come to you with regarding research projects?

Characteristics of Active Listening:

- Repeat key phrases
- Summarize messages
- Show empathy
- Ask for clarification
- Repeat what you’ve heard to confirm and demonstrate understanding
- Let them finish their thoughts
- Allow for some silence. It takes time to think.
- Relaxed, open posture; make eye contact; nod

These conversations are about:

- Relationship Building: Unexpected conversation topics are okay.
- Information gathering: Don’t take time to look up something like the cost of printing, email that information later.