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Are You Hip? Building the Value of Libraries with High-Impact Practices

Ngoc-Yen Tran

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INTRODUCTION: HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES (HIPs)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was created to help institutions identify aspects of the undergraduate experience that can be improved through changes in policy and practice. NSSE's metric of student engagement is defined as, "the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities" (2014). As a result of NSSE data, a set of educational practices were developed by Robert Kuh called high-impact educational practices (or simply, high-impact practices, HIPs). These practices include:

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Undergraduate research
- Diversity/global learning
- Service learning or community-based learning
- Internships
- Capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008)

HIPs are broad and depending on the institution they can take on many different forms and activities. In order to encourage participation, these activities are often combined with one another and offered in a number of iterations across the student curricular and co-curricular experiences (NSSE, 2014). Examples of HIP initiatives include: a common reading program for all first year students or the entire campus, senior capstone projects and presentations, and expanded study abroad opportunities. These practices were developed because research had demonstrated that they had a significant impact on student success, including being beneficial in increasing rates of retention and engagement from students of all backgrounds (Kuh, 2008). Therefore, as higher education strategic plans focus on student retention, graduation rates, and overall student success, it is not surprising to see more and more institutions develop activities rooted in these practices.

As campus priorities shift, libraries cannot be insular or ignore these campus-wide programs and initiatives. In recent decades, all higher education institutions and the departments and units within the institution have been required to demonstrate evidence of their value. This is especially true for campus libraries because they can no longer rely on their status as the "heart of the university" and/or the belief of their importance; libraries are also required to demonstrate their value to administrators, students, parents, faculty, and the general public (ACRL, 2010). There is not a definitive definition for "value", but demonstrating value can be done in a variety of ways, including "use, return-on-investment, commodity production, impact, and alternative comparison" (ACRL, 2010). Ultimately though, what value boils down to is: how does the unit's actions/programs/initiatives/etc. advance the missions of the institution?

As more campuses align their institutional strategies with improving student retention and graduation rates, student engagement, and student learning through the adoption of HIPs, one way that libraries can demonstrate their value is by purposefully contributing to these initiatives or programs and showing the impact that library involvement has had on student retention, learning, and success.

EXAMPLES OF HIPs AND LIBRARIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Undoubtedly, academic libraries have been participating in HIPs. A ubiquitous example is the library's collaboration with first-year seminars/experiences or writing programs to deliver information literacy sessions to students. However, in recent years, there have been more developments of library activities based on HIPs with non-academic departments or as the library's own initiative. For example, at Oregon State University, librarians are organizing a study abroad trip to Barcelona in Summer 2016 that will allow students to gain a greater understanding of what it means to participate in a global society and the forces that affect the information available to us in the United States (Bridges & Elroy, 2016). The course has students doing research, participating in service-learning activities, visiting arts and cultural sites, and interacting with locals. There are multiple elements of HIPs in this example, including global learning, service learning, learning communities, and common intellectual experiences.

At the University of Oregon (UO), we have also developed some unique ways of rooting library activities to the University's focus on HIPs. There are many examples, but the two below bring awareness of library resources and services and/or information literacy to our campus community, all the while demonstrating the library's value and contributing to student retention, engagement, learning, and academic success.

Residence hall libraries: Global Scholars Hall Library Commons

Academic libraries spend a lot of their time providing information literacy instruction to first-year or new students in order to provide them with a common set of competencies or skills for their undergraduate studies: most common are instruction sessions in a first-year seminar or introductory classroom environment. In the last decade or so, recognizing that residential campuses house about 80% of first-year students, librarians have begun outreach efforts to these spaces in collaboration with university housing or residence life departments. However, library outreach to residence halls have been received with mixed successes because students are often unsure what the library or librarian is doing in their living space and what a librarian can help them with. But with the inclusion of HIPs, especially the emphasis on learning communities and common intellectual experiences, residence halls are changing and there are opportunities for libraries to break down interaction barriers (Long, 2011; Strothmann & Antell, 2009) and to create opportunities for awareness of library resources and services to students living in the residence halls that leave a lasting impression.

With the belief that living on campus can increase positive academic involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), UO's University Housing and Residence Life has combined the residential experience with some of the HIPs by developing formal learning communities, often referred to as living-learning communities or residential learning communities. These communities have the goal of creating an environment where students are active participants in their intellectual and academic experiences in a shared space; these types of communities have proven their value to student academic success and retention (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Inkelas, 2008; Kanoy & Bruhn, 1996; Tinto, 2003). In the next year, UO plans to expand their offerings of academic residential communities with the addition and renovation of more residence halls.

As HIPs and living-learning communities become prioritized on campuses, more libraries will be asked to support these students in non-traditional methods, such as through the development and administration of residence hall libraries (RHLs). Although it might seem like a new idea, RHLs have had a long presence on college campuses with the earliest recorded at Harvard University in 1928 (Morgan, 1931). Seeing potential in this library model to enrich learning, many institutions between the 1920s and 1980s developed and supported RHLs (Stanford, 1969). At the peak of RHL development, 20 institutions in North America had RHL systems (Miller, 82), but over the years, with increases to the student population, insufficient staffing, budgetary constraints, and other factors many were discontinued. Today, there are only three institutions with operating RHLs: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Indiana University, and University of Oregon.

As educational practices based on common intellectual experiences and learning communities continue to grow, library involvement in teaching information literacy through formal and informal channels in the residence halls can help to demonstrate the library's value. By having a physical library space that is conveniently located downstairs, is warm and welcoming, and contains the resources needed to transition from high school to college can encourage student use. Findings have indicated that "students who use the library in some way achieved higher levels of academic success than students who did not use the library" (ACRL, 2016). Additionally, providing an on-site librarian who can introduce first-year students to the resources required for college-level research and scholarship and someone who can mentor them as they develop new knowledge contributes to student learning and engagement. Moreover, as a continual presence in the residence hall, the librarian can develop academic rapport with students by being available

and responsive and showing interest in student academic and personal lives, “can influence student motivation, academic engagement, and enjoyment of courses and learning in general” (ACRL 2016). All these factors can contribute to increasing a students’ probability to persist and continue at an institution to completion, while also showing evidence of the library’s impact and value.

Enhanced Research Skills Certificate Program (ERSCP)

Preparing undergraduates to conduct research is at the heart of academic librarianship, especially through information literacy instruction in the classroom. However, this method of visiting classrooms does not reach all students (Kraemer, Keyse, & Lombardo, 2003) nor does it provide students with the advanced skills they need to conduct mentored research with faculty or independent research. Anecdotal evidence gathered from undergraduate students and faculty members have indicated two things: (1) students are very interested in research but are unsure of how to get started and not confident in their ability to effectively conduct research, which implies that they may also be lacking higher level research skills, and (2) faculty members receive many requests during the academic year from students seeking research experiences, but they are hesitant to say “yes” because the skill level needed to enter research and the requisite training that is required makes taking on students prohibitive, or because they do not have any positions available.

A robust institutional undergraduate research profile requires that adequate research opportunities exist and that the student body is sufficiently prepared to conduct research. Therefore, to provide the skills undergraduates need to conduct mentored research, the UO Libraries collaborated with the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program to develop and pilot a co-curricular series of workshops that assisted in addressing the issue of student preparedness for research. The Enhanced Research Skills Certificate Program (ERSCP) focused on training students in five key research skills: (1) Responsible conduct of research, (2) Finding scholarly literature in a discipline and managing and organizing information, (3) Understanding data, (4) Collecting and using data and information ethically, and (5) Writing abstracts and communicating research. Students who attended all five workshops received a participation certificate that they could point to as they consider mentored research opportunities. Additionally, they can use the skills they learned for independent or research for course projects and assignments, thereby, adding value to the students’ long-term academic experiences.

In preparing students to conduct mentored or independent research, the ERSCP enforces the impact of the library on student retention and success because undergraduate research represents one of the stronger examples of a HIP that can advance the key characteristics of a university’s mission. Mentored research, in which students and faculty work together to discover new knowledge, apply it to their discipline, and share it locally, nationally, and globally, is instrumental in helping individuals think analytically, question critically, and discover the enduring joy of inquiry. Additionally, the ERSCP strengthens undergraduate education in providing additional outlets for faculty to teach, research, service, and foster the creation of a community of scholars.

CONCLUSION

There is no shortage of opportunities for libraries and librarians to take part in building the value of libraries through collaborative or individual initiatives or programs that are rooted in HIPs. Two examples at the University of Oregon include the Libraries partnering with University Housing and Residence Life, and the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program to support the common intellectual experiences, learning communities, first-year experiences, and undergraduate research HIPs. Anecdotally, these collaborations have risen the profile of the Libraries on campus as a potentially strong supporter of student retention, engagement, learning, and overall academic success.

Libraries are in constant change and being “hip” with the latest trends is not always easy or worthwhile. However, as institutional priorities and philosophies focus on enhancing the undergraduate experience and to support retention and graduation rates, student engagement, and student learning through the incorporation of high-impact educational practices (HIPs), libraries can demonstrate their value by aligning the work that they do with these institutional educational practices and to show the impact of their work to stakeholders.

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