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Title

You're Hired! A Library's Collaboration with the Career Services Department

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Abstract

The Library collaborating with non-academic departments to further strategic goals is beneficial to both parties. In the summer of 2016, the Hubert Library at Florida International University began working with the Career Services Department to provide career research assistance to students, alumni, and employees. This paper highlights the elements of this collaboration, discusses the obstacles encountered and how they were dealt with, and provides practical tips for creating better partnerships.

Introduction

In the summer of 2016, the Hubert Library at Florida International University (FIU) Libraries began a collaboration with the Career Services Department on their Biscayne Bay Campus in order to provide additional career research assistance to students and alumni. The collaboration was created in response to one of the goals of the FIU Libraries' 2015-2020 Strategic Plan: to *“Develop strategic partnerships that support student success goals – Create opportunities to partner with academic units/campus organizations to co-host events in the libraries and Partner with advisors who work directly with first year students, transfer students and at-risk students”* (FIU Libraries Strategic Plan n.d.).

The collaboration focused on two goals. The first was raise awareness of the library and career services among students, alumni, and FIU employees. The other goal was to highlight practical resources that can be used in career, job, or internship searches. The goals of the collaboration were left deliberately simple to see how it would grow on its own.

According to a national survey of academic librarians collaborating with non-academic departments, the top three benefits of collaboration are a “broader awareness of library services, a positive reputation, and a better ability to break down campus silos and build relationships” (Wainwright and Davidson 2017, 122). Since a major part of this collaboration was to highlight library resources, students gained a new awareness of how the library could benefit their career. This led to a better overall view of the library and its usefulness beyond the classroom. The connection with Career Services broke down the “silos” referred to in the survey, as each department brought a particular brand of expertise to the collaboration and access to different student populations. The two departments were able to pool their resources to provide this unique service. As an added benefit, career counselors from the Career Services department were

able to gain new insights for their own efforts from the librarian “research expert,” who introduced them to resources previously unknown to the counselors. The collaboration thus enhanced each department’s offerings and served to develop existing skills and untapped resources.

About Florida International University

Florida International University is a major R1 Research university with approximately 54,000 students, situated in Miami-Dade County, FL. It has multiple campuses throughout the county, but the two largest are the Modesto A. Maidique Campus (MMC), in West Miami-Dade County, and the Biscayne Bay Campus (BBC) in North Miami. The BBC campus, where the collaboration took place, features a vibrant student life, multiple classroom buildings, the Hubert Library, student housing, a student center, and offices for most university departments (Florida International University n.d.). The Hubert Library serves the needs of the students, employees, and other patrons of the FIU BBC campus. The Career Services office offers students and alumni with “innovative career readiness programming” (FIU Student Affairs n.d.). The services in these departments mirror those of the larger, MMC campus.

About the Project

The collaboration began when I approached the Director for Career Services at BBC who quickly connected me with the Assistant Director, who became the point person for the project. After a few brainstorming sessions, a plan arose to create three elements: 1) a research LibGuide, 2) a series of career research workshops, and 3) a collection of career research materials for the library. Each element would assist students and alumni searching for career guidance.

Career Research Workshops

At the beginning of the project, the Library and Career Services offered career research workshops that revolved around common themes including entrepreneurship, sales, international business, management, government, and sustainability and the environment. The goal was to bring attendees together, regardless of major or background, who were interested in careers with these broad similarities. We quickly realized that this type of workshop was not having the effect that we had hoped. There were too many variables, such as different personal interests and career goals, to make the workshops viable. For example, someone interested in being an entrepreneur can work in many industries; the discussion would thus require information on too wide of a range of backgrounds and education requirements for the time allotted.

After one semester of offering workshops based on career type, the team decided to change the aim of the sessions to careers by major. These workshops proved more successful because attendees shared a common interest through their major. The sessions could then focus on a select number of industries and variables instead of the variety that had previously been offered. One example is a career research workshop that focused on careers for psychology majors at the College of Psychology's Annual Student Conference at BBC. This workshop aimed to connect with students at an event targeted for their career development and help them research relevant career information. Other major-focused workshops included sessions on careers in Hospitality, Journalism & Mass Communications, and Nursing & Health Sciences. These major-focused workshops produced better results for both instructors and attendees— more attendees asked relevant questions and remarked on their helpfulness. They also resulted in higher attendance than the original, career-based workshops.

The format was the same for both types of workshops. The Career Services representative would begin with general information about a career or job type, and I, the librarian, would take over to discuss the benefits of research in all aspects of the job search. Attendees were shown a combination of print and online library resources, as well as websites relevant to their career search. To justify the need for research, I would explain how specific knowledge of a major, career, industry, company, or job would better equip them to find the right fit for their professional goals.

Career Research LibGuide

One tool created to enhance this partnership was the Career Research LibGuide (<http://libguides.fiu.edu/career>). This is a one-stop website with links to various sources for career information, including educational resources on all aspects of career research, lists of job boards, and Career Services and Library contact information. There are frequent updates to the LibGuide with new subjects, links, and educational resources added on a regular basis.

Content for the LibGuide was curated in many ways. First, there was a great amount of online research done to find the most relevant and reputable links. There were also suggestions from Career Services staff who have a vast amount of knowledge on the subject of career research. Conversations with student job seekers also led to ideas for what kinds of content would be of interest. Finally, industry professionals would occasionally send links to useful websites and articles. For example, representatives from LinkedIn routinely sent suggestions about their latest product. Although these were unsolicited, many of the sites proved to be useful tools that had been overlooked. As with anything online, the LibGuide is a work in progress, constantly being updated to change outdated information, remove broken links, and add new and fresh content.

The LibGuide has been used in many ways to assist students and alumni with their career research. It is a heavily used tool during the workshops to show how to find relevant information fast. It is also simple enough for students to navigate on their own. The link is posted on the Career Services website, where it serves as a backup for students who are unable to attend the workshops in person. It is also a place for career counselors to refer students for additional career resources.

Collection Development

The last piece of the collaboration is the development of a career research collection in the library. The titles include general subjects, such as how to write cover letters and resumes, interviewing skills, and career research, as well as titles based on the subjects of upcoming workshops. For example, in anticipation of a workshop for international students seeking job placement in the United States, the library purchased books on finding jobs in the US to meet their particular needs. A regularly updated list of titles appears on the career LibGuide. Like the LibGuide, this collection is an ongoing project, with new titles purchased as needed.

Marketing

Since this series had no budget for marketing, each department relied on free or existing methods to advertise upcoming events. We did this in several ways: one was through the Career Services website. This page already received heavy traffic from students and alumni searching for jobs, so the addition of the workshops to the website's calendar of events was a great starting place. Fliers and bulletin boards were also strategically placed in the entrance to the library, where many of the workshops took place, and in front of the Career Services offices. Finally, workshops were posted on the Campus Activities Calendar, managed by the university's Campus

Life department, with dates posted to the Campus Life website and printed on a glossy flier that is distributed across campus (at no cost to the departments).

Results

Since the start of the partnership, the team has hosted 18 career research workshops, totaling over 300 attendees. Meanwhile, the LibGuide has received more than 3,000 visitors since its creation in August 2016. In addition to tangible numbers, the team also saw other, unexpected results.

One result was the opportunity to form collaborations with other departments outside the partnership. In order to promote the career workshops, I started attending campus-wide programming meetings. These meetings led to discussions with staff members from other campus departments and resulted in new ideas for programs. Examples include working with BBC's Healthy Living Department to host wellness and relaxation programs, and working with the Campus Life Department to offer coffee hours in the library. These collaborations were possible due to the initial connection to Career Services.

Another unexpected result was that the collaboration helped bring attention to the library's newly renovated instruction lab. Redesigned and unveiled during Spring 2017 semester, the lab features state-of-the-art instruction technology and a convenient location on the first floor of the library, next to the campus coffee shop. Because it was so new, not many groups had used the room yet. The workshops held in this lab helped raise awareness of the room and increase usage by members of the university community.

Obstacles

With any new endeavor, there are bound to be obstacles and this collaboration was no exception. Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles was demonstrating the added value of working together. Every department at a major university like FIU has their own set of goals, internal mandates, and challenges to meet. In short, they are already dealing with a very full and busy schedule. Because of this, adding a new initiative, however useful, can be a challenge. Because it was the library's idea, the onus was on me to show the benefit to Career Services. I did this by demonstrating research expertise and showing how this knowledge would enhance existing services to students.

Another obstacle is that the project proved larger than expected. Because FIU's two main campuses are about an hour's drive apart, it is difficult to find the time to host events or attend workshops outside my home base. This became evident at a "train the trainer event" designed to highlight resources available to Career Services staff from both campuses. While there, the staff from the MMC campus requested career research workshops for students on their campus. This was not ideal because the demand for these workshops would exceed my ability to travel between both campuses and perform my regular duties. The solution was to offer as many resources as possible via the Career Services website and provide additional staff training, while coordinating with a librarian from the MMC Green Library to host occasional workshops.

There were also obstacles when determining how the two departments were going to work together. Navigating hierarchies can be a challenge; it takes some time to figure out who is going to take the lead and what each department is going to do. One thing to consider is what are the other department's deadlines? In this case, the Career Services office had early deadlines to get everything on their calendar. Therefore, workshops had to be scheduled around these deadlines. It is also important to make sure there is time to communicate any issues that may

arise. For example, the workshops were originally called “Job Search Lab,” but were changed to “Job Search Resources” when it was discovered Career Services already had an initiative called “Job Search Lab.” It is important to make sure that representatives from both departments can work together toward a common goal and that supervisors are on board with whatever is mutually agreed upon in each department.

The time commitment for such a partnership is also worth considering. Ensuring that the collaboration ran smoothly took some planning and adjusting. At the beginning of the partnership, I spent about 3-5 hours per week for approximately 3-4 weeks preparing various elements. This included setting up the LibGuide, planning workshops, and purchasing career-related books. One to two months before each semester, I met with Career Services to brainstorm topics, choose dates, and reserve locations for upcoming workshops. We decided this in advance in order to get the workshops on the departmental and campus calendars before printing. Each workshop required an additional hour or two of planning based on the topic to be covered. The topic was researched, and relevant resources found, vetted, and organized into a teachable format. This sometimes took longer depending on the intricacies of the topic, and included updating the LibGuide and outlining discussion points for the class. There was also a significant amount of time spent finding and purchasing the materials for the career collection. On the Career Services side of the collaboration, time was spent selecting topics, scheduling events, and preparing for the presentation.

Takeaways

The obstacles encountered have been helpful in shaping the collaboration into what it is today. We have been able to be flexible with how we go about accomplishing the original goals,

and have emerged with a more streamlined and effective partnership. While far from perfect, and always in a state of adjustment, here are some of the takeaways.

One of the biggest takeaways is that all parties must be persistent, flexible, and creative. There were many times when things did not go as expected. For example, after the first semester, when we realized that the focus of the workshops was not producing the expected result and we had to go back to the drawing board. The outcome, sessions based on careers by major, proved to be a smart move, increasing attendance and students' understanding of the resources available. Overall, the feedback was positive and we continue to modify workshops and resources to improve the experience of attendees.

Another takeaway from this collaboration was the importance of establishing deadlines and expectations ahead of time and deciding who will handle each task. This helps to keep tasks organized and prevent duplicate effort. Although it is important to be flexible, it is also beneficial to know who is supposed to do what and when.

Regular communication between departments is also essential to keep the collaboration running smoothly. Departmental priorities and scheduling conflicts can cause plans to change. It is best to know what to expect from each other in advance.

Conclusion and moving forward

The ongoing collaboration between FIU's Hubert Library and the Career Services Department at BBC has been beneficial to those involved. It also continues to change to meet the needs of FIU students and employees. One such change is to create workshops targeting populations with specific job research needs, such as athletes and international students. While their majors may vary, they have enough in common to make a workshop geared toward them

viable. Another idea is to shorten the amount of time spent on lectures to incorporate more hands-on activities. After hosting several workshops, it became clear that attendees want guidance in using some of the resources covered. The plan, therefore, is to change the format so there is a brief overview of relevant career research tools followed by a hands-on activity. Still another idea involves producing 5-minute career research video tutorials and uploading them to the university job board, Handshake. This would help students who are unable to attend workshops, or are looking for a quick refresher on a specific resource. These are just a few examples for future collaboration.

Collaborating with Career Services or another non-academic department is highly recommended. For those looking to forge partnerships, consider how it will benefit each department and look for ways to get buy-in from department supervisors who may be concerned by the time commitment. Also, think about the best way to approach members of other departments to bring up the question of collaboration. This depends on the culture of each department. Is it more formal? Would a casual coffee break suffice? It is also important to think about how much time and resources are available to spend. Making a lasting connection with another department takes long-term planning and commitment; it is not something that develops overnight. However, the opportunity to increase awareness of available services and strengthen the ability to help students will benefit everyone involved.

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