

**BEYOND THESE WALLS:
BUILDING A LIBRARY OUTREACH PROGRAM
AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY**

Elizabeth W. Kraemer
Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian
Kresge Library
Oakland University
Rochester, MI 48309

Dana J. Keyse
Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian
Kresge Library
Oakland University
Rochester, MI 48309

Shawn V. Lombardo
Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian
Kresge Library
Oakland University
Rochester, MI 48309

INTRODUCTION

As college campuses grow increasingly diverse and academic libraries grow increasingly complex, students are falling through the cracks of traditional approaches to information literacy education. Many students with special needs, including those with physical or learning disabilities, require individualized services and support that they cannot obtain in a one-shot library instruction session. Others, such as distance learning students, manage to avoid contact with library staff altogether. To enhance the learning experiences of all students, today's academic librarians must engage in outreach efforts that, as Lynn Westbrook and Robert Waldman assert, "reach patrons outside of the library—wherever they are accessing, evaluating, or manipulating information."¹ Effective outreach takes into account the information needs of the student as well as the potential barriers that may inhibit learning; for example, one goal of most library instruction programs is to create a more accessible learning environment for students, one that frees them to approach staff for assistance and to complete their work without feeling disconnected from the academic library setting. In the past year, Oakland University's Kresge Library has made significant inroads in developing outreach initiatives that provide needed services to previously underserved student populations. At the same time, these programs have increased the library's visibility, enhanced its image among the university's students, faculty, and staff alike, and positioned it at the heart of teaching and learning on campus. This article describes some of these outreach efforts.

BACKGROUND

Oakland University (OU) is a state-supported institution located in suburban Michigan, about thirty-five miles northwest of Detroit. The university has grown rapidly in recent years, with a fall 2002 semester enrollment of 16,059 students (12,634 undergraduate and 3,425 graduate students), marking the seventh consecutive year of rising enrollment. This growth has brought with it an increasingly diverse population. Approximately 16 percent of students identify themselves as members of a minority group, with the largest portions comprising African American students (7.2 percent), and international students (2.7 percent). In addition, about 330 students actively seek out the university's Office of Disability Services.² OU also has a large transfer student population, comprising approximately one half of new students each year.

One of the library's major service initiatives is its collaboration with the university's first-year writing program. In coordination with instructors of Rhetoric 160 (RHT 160), a required first-year writing course in which students must complete a major research paper, librarians have developed an instruction program to introduce students to the library, its services and the academic research process. This program uses both online instruction—in the form of a Web-based tutorial designed by librarian Beth Kraemer — and two hours of in-person instruction provided by librarians. Because RHT 160 is a required course, the library is able to reach a large number of students each year; during the 2001-2002 academic year, for example, OU librarians provided instruction for 102 sections of RHT 160, reaching 2,154 undergraduates.

A second major library outreach initiative has focused on the library's liaison program with the university's academic departments. Each department is assigned a

librarian liaison who coordinates collection development activities for that discipline. Liaisons also promote library instruction and other library services and resources to their respective departments. The purpose of the liaison program is to facilitate communication between the library and the university's academic units, and to expand the library's instructional efforts through the development of subject-based instruction sessions for individual courses.

It appears, however, that these efforts fell short of supporting the research and learning activities of every student at OU. For instance, students who delay taking RHT 160, sometimes until their senior year, are not introduced to library research methods until late in their academic careers. And a large number of transfer students opt out of RHT 160 by taking an equivalent course at their previous institutions, thereby bypassing an introduction to OU library services and resources altogether. Liaison relationships with academic departments also have failed to reach whole categories of students, though the liaison program with academic departments has been moderately successful. For example, the librarian liaison to the education department has developed an excellent relationship with that department, providing extensive instruction to both undergraduate and graduate students, and training sessions for faculty in new library resources and services. However, outreach to other departments, especially those in which faculty are not frequent library users, has proven more difficult. As a result, students in these disciplines are not exposed to the library's offerings as extensively as students in other disciplines. Other students may experience anxiety in a standard library instruction session because of their unfamiliarity with the library environment. International students, for example, may be unfamiliar with procedures in American libraries and thus

have even more difficulty with library protocols and jargon than the average undergraduate. Finally, many students, such as those with physical and learning disabilities, might benefit more from one-on-one instruction that takes their individual needs into consideration.

The library obviously needed to move beyond the academic departments to target underserved student populations. When planning a strategy for the marketing of library services and resources, Westbrook and Waldman recommend that institutions “determine the mechanisms on campus that provide students, staff, and faculty with information.”³ The library’s first move, then—and the impetus for much of what has been accomplished in the past year—was to reach out to the Student Affairs division. This university department oversees student activities and organizations, residence halls, new student programs, disability support services, advising, the academic skills center, and services to minority and international students. The Dean of the Library arranged for a group of librarians to attend a meeting of Student Affairs department leaders in the fall 2001 semester. The librarians’ approach to this meeting was two-fold: to introduce themselves, and to market library services in terms of what Kresge librarians could do to help Student Affairs staff improve student retention and success. The participation of both the Dean of the Library and the Vice President for Student Affairs demonstrated a high level of administrative support for collaboration between the two units. Some ideas that were shared during this meeting included specialized library orientations and instruction, individualized research consultations for students, and ideas for creative programming such as a book discussion group for students living in the residence halls. A number of

initiatives, described below, developed as a result of this meeting, while subsequent contacts presented additional outreach opportunities.

Since the librarians have become further acquainted with the directors and support staff in Student Affairs, they have been invited to do more than the outreach activities initially envisioned. Kresge Library is now heavily involved in campus-wide events such as Welcome Week, African American Celebration Month, Cultural Awareness Week, and Disability Awareness Day. This method of networking with students, faculty and staff has proved invaluable to the expansion of library outreach efforts across the campus.

CURRENT OUTREACH EFFORTS AT KRESGE LIBRARY

Outreach to New Students

One of the goals of Kresge Library is to introduce new students to library resources and services during their first year at the university. However, since most students take RHT 160 during the winter semester as the second of two required writing courses, they do not encounter a librarian until their second semester at OU. This can cause new first-semester students to feel overwhelmed and confused by an academic library, a situation that librarians wanted to alleviate through targeted outreach initiatives. Prior to the fall 2001 meeting with Student Affairs, the library had participated sparingly in new student orientation activities. However, in 2001 librarian Shawn Lombardo volunteered to serve as liaison to the Office of New Student Programs (ONSP), within the university's Student Affairs division, and worked to include the library in a variety of ONSP events to welcome and orient new students to the university. She designed

handouts for students' orientation packets that highlighted the library's timesaving and convenient services, including remote access to resources, full-text databases, electronic reserves, and e-mail reference services. And, because they felt that students would respond well to library tours led by their peers, Lombardo and fellow librarian Dana Keyse trained Orientation Group Leaders—upper-class students who plan and direct orientation activities for incoming students—to provide these tours to new students.

Lombardo, Keyse, and Kraemer also participated in a series of parent orientation sessions sponsored by ONSP in the summer of 2002. Paired with staff from the university's Office of Information Technology, they participated in interactive question and answer sessions for parents of incoming first-year students. Parents seemed interested in the university's information technology recommendations for student laptops and other technology needs, but also in the library resources and services that were available online, especially remotely. Since then, parents have accompanied their incoming students more frequently to the library to “check out” its services and resources. The three librarians believe that these visits, in part, demonstrate their success in publicizing library services to parents.

Throughout the fall 2002 semester, Kresge Library outreach specialists worked to continue building relationships with students new to the university. Lombardo and Keyse, for example, targeted students enrolled in the university's Peer Connections program, which supports student cohort groups taking many of the same courses together during their first year at OU. Although most of these students will receive more comprehensive library instruction during their second semester at the university, Lombardo and Keyse wanted to introduce them to the library and its services early in their academic careers.

They provided brief, casual presentations to these groups, with the goal of making the library a bit less intimidating to students just out of high school. These sessions provided an opportunity for students to ask about library services and resources in a supportive, informal setting. They received positive feedback for these efforts from Peer Connections group leaders, who indicated that students were both surprised and glad that a librarian was available to them. What the librarians learned is that a little effort goes a long way in improving the library's image and perceived accessibility.

Future projects for outreach to first-year students are being developed as well. To reach even more new students, Lombardo plans to target sections of Communications 101, a course that introduces first-year students to university life. In coordination with other librarians, she plans to offer brief online tutorials and informal presentations to these groups before their more formal introduction to library research in RHT 160.

One important initiative still in its infancy is outreach to the university's transfer student population. It is crucial for their future retention and success to target these students for library orientation and instruction. According to Staines, community college librarians report that a large number of transfer students return to their previous institutions to conduct research because they feel more comfortable in that setting.⁴ In fact, Still posits that students who transfer to four-year institutions from community colleges and other two-year schools may be overwhelmed by a larger academic library.⁵ And according to a recent survey reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, transfer students are less likely to feel connected to their institution than students who begin and end their academic careers at the same institution.⁶ Unfortunately, it seems that many schools do not have instruction programs targeted specifically to transfer students. For

example, Staines' 1996 study revealed that more than 35 percent of the four-year institutions and community colleges surveyed offered no special library instruction services to transfer students.⁷ Moreover, transfer students are a difficult group to target.

Using a multi-tiered approach, Lombardo collaborated with ONSP to reach out to OU transfer students. In doing so, she worked under the assumption that, most likely, transfer students are busy people, employed at least part-time and perhaps also caring for families. In fall 2001, Lombardo developed a handout specifically directed toward transfer students to include in their orientation packets. The handout emphasized library resources and services, such as remote access, full-text databases, and electronic course reserves that could save students time and effort. More than half of OU's transfer students come from area community colleges. Because of this, Lombardo also stressed the availability of personalized research consultations and other reference assistance to address those students who may feel more overwhelmed at a larger institution than at their previous school. In addition, Lombardo held brief workshops at the beginning of the winter 2002 semester to orient students to basic library resources. Publicity for the workshops appeared on signs in the library, handouts distributed during transfer student orientation sessions, and the library's Web site. Although not initially well attended, many transfer students expressed interest in the sessions, so they will be offered again each winter semester, when more transfer students enroll than at any other time of year. As Lombardo continues her work with transfer students, she plans to expand the library's marketing and outreach efforts, perhaps to include a designated Transfer Student Day at the library, where librarians offer tours, workshops, and free coffee to attendees. She also hopes to obtain a list of e-mail addresses of transfer students and check in with them over

the course of the semester, offering research assistance during the midterm and final periods.

Along with these outreach efforts, OU librarians also began to think about programming that would increase the library's visibility and generally attract more students. For the first time, the library participated extensively in Welcome Week activities at the beginning of the fall 2002 semester, and with much success. Lombardo and Keyse served on the university-wide planning committee, responsible for organizing events to welcome new and returning students to OU during the first week of the semester. Library participation in Welcome Week included a daylong "library coffee house" with free mugs, coffee and snacks, held in the library's student lounge. As part of this celebration, Lombardo and Keyse created a book display of faculty publications and invited faculty to view the display and chat with students. Library faculty and staff were encouraged to join the coffee house and conversation as well. Students voiced their appreciation of the event; in fact, one student suggested that the library host such an event every day! Other Welcome Week activities included library tours and a drawing in which students could enter to win a gift basket by registering their library cards at the circulation desk. These events proved to be very popular with students, as evidenced by the nearly 4 percent increase in the door count over the same period in the previous year. These numbers have encouraged Kresge Library to expand future Welcome Week participation, and perhaps bring back the very popular coffee house during midterms and finals.

Multicultural and Cultural Outreach

As Westbrook and Waldman state, “taking the time to accurately picture user information needs outside the library is crucial to effective, efficient outreach.”⁸ By attending, promoting and advising on various campus social activities as the diversity liaison to Student Affairs, librarian Dana Keyse serves not only as a representative of Kresge Library and a faculty advisor, but in some cases, as a mentor. Moving beyond the standard survey or focus group, perhaps the most effective way to assess students’ information needs is to build relationships with them. Indeed, most students’ tenure at a university will last fewer than five years, some of the relationships developed during those years will last into their professional careers. In terms of marketing, on- and off-campus, these students will gladly serve as library advocates. Word-of-mouth recommendations from respected peers to incoming students will always surpass any carefully planned marketing tool, though it is the carefully planned marketing tool—in this case, an outreach program such as the coffee house—that starts the cycle.

As a member of the African American Celebration Committee, Keyse currently advises students on a program about the history of African American music, which will be presented by Oakland University’s Association of Black Students. She also is co-sponsoring campus showings of the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., to promote the campus unity march and has participated in Disability Awareness Day with a kiosk of assistive technology equipment housed in the library. By attending campus events with related library resource handouts, and by creating displays and Web pages to support campus events such as Cultural Awareness Week and African American Celebration

Month, Kresge librarians have not only made themselves visible, but invaluable as an information resource.

In a presentation at the American Library Association (ALA) 2002 Annual Conference, Isabel Espinal, of ALA's Office of Literacy and Outreach Services, defined multicultural outreach as "activities or organizational efforts to reach out to distinct cultural groups on your campus who are not part of U.S. mainstream or dominant culture."⁹ With this in mind, Keyse created the *Kresge Library Diversity Resources* Web site,¹⁰ <http://www.kl.oakland.edu/DiversityResources/DiversityResources.html>, with input solicited from leaders of various minority-based student groups on campus and their faculty advisors. The site focuses on social and cultural studies of the following groups: African Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans/Latinos, Native Americans, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender, and Women. It aids students in their research for cultural studies and other diversity-related coursework with links providing access to primary documents through special archives, museum exhibits and research materials. The resource also links to bibliographies and online journals for cultural and diversity studies and provides scholarship and career information, lists of social organizations, and recreational sites. From the site, Keyse offers research consultations on cultural or other projects, providing yet another point of contact with students who may not be using library services otherwise. The Web site is meant to be a work in progress, promising something new and interesting with each visit, with continual development based on user feedback. While soliciting input from the leaders of student groups, Keyse has enlisted them to promote the site within their groups and elsewhere on campus. Additionally, librarians discuss the site in library instruction

sessions with relevant courses. Keyse also promotes the site at various events on campus such as Hispanic Heritage Month, Cultural Awareness Week, and African American Celebration Month. By putting a face with the site at these gatherings, outreach becomes both high-tech and high-touch.

Residence Halls Outreach

There are more than 1,100 students living in the 6 residence halls on campus.¹¹ As outreach efforts at Kresge Library have expanded, so has the desire to connect with these students living on campus. Beth Kraemer volunteered to serve as the librarian liaison to the Residence Halls, and during the winter semester of 2001 she attended one of the monthly Residence Halls Council meetings to promote library services. Kraemer also began working with the library administration to develop a unique, educational and social program targeting on-campus residents; the OU Residence Halls Book Club emerged from this program. The plan for this program was for Kraemer to gather once or twice a semester with members of the book club to discuss a work of the group's choosing. By limiting membership to perhaps ten or twelve students, the book club would maintain a casual environment and thereby avoid the lecture hall feel. The University Housing Program Coordinator offered enthusiastic backing of the book club, and invited Kraemer to present the idea to students at a Halls Council meeting in the fall of 2002. Additional publicity was handled by mailing flyers to each Resident Advisor for posting on residence hall bulletin boards, and by setting up a display just outside of the cafeteria with book club flyers.

To get the group started, Kraemer chose Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest* as the book club's first selection. Because this new program was somewhat of an experiment,

the purchase of the books was funded by the library administration so that the students would get to keep their copies, and the facilitator's copy would be added to the library's book collection. The book club held its inaugural meeting in November 2002, with a membership of six students. As a venue for the gathering, one of the members offered the student lounge located on her floor, where the book club gathered couches and comfortable chairs into a circle for the meeting. The library furnished light snacks and beverages, and the students were very pleased with their first meeting, indicating a desire to continue the program. The book club members voted unanimously to read the first two books in the Harry Potter series for the next meeting, to be held early in the winter 2003 semester. The library administration will continue to fund the venture for the remainder of the 2002-2003 academic year; beyond that, Kraemer plans to seek a grant over the summer of 2003 to cover expenses of the book club for several years, depending on the success of the next few meetings and continued interest from on-campus residents.

By offering programs such as the OU Residence Halls Book Club, Kraemer not only wants to raise the profile of the library on campus, but also to connect with students in a fun and casual way. The hope is that the next time those students need help with a class project or term paper, perhaps they will turn to a librarian before they turn to the Internet. And judging from the enthusiastic response to the book club from the students involved, it just might work.

Honors College Outreach

In the fall 2001 semester, the then-Interim Director of the Oakland University Honors College attended faculty meetings across campus to raise awareness of the

program. As a result, the library administrators created the role of librarian liaison to the Honors College, asking Beth Kraemer to take the position because of her background as an honors college student in her undergraduate career. Kraemer accepted the responsibility and developed a flyer outlining library services to the Honors College, which she distributed among faculty members teaching in the honors program. Some of the services offered are customized library instruction sessions for honors classes, a display case for student work, presentation space for class projects, and individual research consultations with students working on a class project or their honors theses. The Honors College Director supported the outreach efforts fully, encouraging faculty members to contact the library for assistance.

During the summer of 2002, Kraemer sent a memo to the seven faculty members teaching honors courses in the upcoming fall semester. In her memo she once again outlined services available to the honors community, emphasizing that library instruction could be customized to suit each course. At the beginning of the fall 2002 term, Kraemer also attended the Honors College faculty orientation to publicize library services to the instructors. These marketing efforts resulted in two instruction sessions in the fall of 2002. Six honors courses are being offered in the winter 2003 semester, and Kraemer contacted those instructors in November of 2002. Several responses from interested faculty members were received within hours.

The Honors College faculty and staff have been eager to integrate the librarian liaison into the honors community on campus, and further outreach efforts with the Honors College are being discussed. For example, at least once each academic year, Kraemer will conduct a library instruction session for Honors College students to teach

some advanced searching techniques as well as specialized research databases. To ensure attendance, the sessions will be held at the Honors College facility, where there are several networked computers available to students. With the help of the new Digital Information Services Librarian at Kresge Library, Kraemer is also developing an online, searchable database of the honors theses collection that is housed at the honors facility. The two librarians met with the new Honors College Director in October 2002 to discuss the database design, which will be developed by the librarians and maintained by the Honors College staff. In addition, the honors students have begun publication of a newsletter, and Kraemer hopes to get involved with that project by submitting brief research tips for each issue. Future plans for the Honors College outreach also include more library instruction sessions, held at the honors facility, especially targeted at those students working on their theses. Finally, the Honors College Director has expressed interest in having the librarian liaison meet with faculty members serving as honors thesis advisors to promote research consultations and assistance.

PLANS FOR FUTURE OUTREACH EFFORTS

The outreach efforts described in this article are only the beginning for the librarians at Oakland University, as there are a number of additional groups on campus that the outreach specialists at Kresge Library hope to contact in order to establish partnerships. This section outlines some of those plans.

Due to Proposition 48, enacted in 1983 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, student athletes have strict guidelines about securing acceptable grades in

order to keep their scholarships, as well as their eligibilities to play.¹² Despite the rigors of both practice time and game schedules, these students are expected to be academic achievers in their institutions; because of this, library outreach to the Athletic Department would likely be very welcome. Services for student athletes could include specialized bibliographic instruction, fast turnaround email reference assistance, and research consultations held at their practice facility.

OU has a growing number of undergraduate students who participate in high-level research projects of the type many other universities reserve for graduate students. The efforts of these student scholars are encouraged through the new Research Scholar Program, which annually awards twenty to forty \$1,000 grants for approved projects.¹³ Similarly high-performing students are found among other academic scholarship winners at Oakland; naturally, the criteria for these awards require students to maintain excellent grade point averages. Many possibilities for intensive library outreach programs exist among these academically motivated students. Librarians would develop information literacy workshops to help students better understand and navigate the information landscape by teaching them to use relevant research tools. Moreover, these workshops would address broader research issues such as the evaluation of information resources, intellectual property (especially in an online environment), academic freedom versus ownership, scholarly attribution and documentation, and plagiarism. Further efforts to accommodate would include personal research consultations, promotion of a display case that could be used to spotlight student projects, and even quiet computer lab space in the library rooms normally reserved for bibliographic instruction. By offering such focused assistance, the OU librarians could help these students excel.

The Academic Skills Center at Oakland University offers services to encourage students seeking extra assistance, and supports their academic efforts. In the winter 2003 semester, Keyse will participate for the first time in the Research Skills workshop offered by the Academic Skills Center to highlight services that the library can provide. By teaming up with this department, she hopes to build bridges with students needing supplemental instruction, tutoring, and study skills tips.

At many universities, graduate students are a difficult population to reach en masse, and Oakland University is no exception in this arena. Erroneously assuming that graduate students already are proficient in conducting research in their disciplines, many faculty do not perceive a great need for in-class library instruction. Contrary to this assumption, the provision of useful library services to this set of students is vital, and efforts to develop a strong relationship with the Department of Graduate Admissions and Student Services are already underway. Expanded efforts to graduate students could include dissertation/thesis writing workshops and research support groups. By catering to the research needs of graduate students with advanced services, the outreach librarians will help these scholars reach their academic and professional goals.

CONCLUSION

The number of librarians at Oakland University has not increased in proportion to the growth of the student population over the years, and Kresge Library and the university it serves are preparing for budget cuts in higher education at the state level. In spite of this, librarians are actively engaging in outreach. Student Affairs and Kresge

Library have teamed up to integrate campus activities and services with students' classroom experiences in order to increase retention. As a result, the number of both in-person and electronic reference transactions has risen, after years of decline. Higher library door counts at the beginning of the fall 2002 semester indicate that outreach programs during new student orientations and Welcome Week are making a significant impact. Even as librarians are promoting the convenience of off-campus access to research services, more students are coming into the library.

External partnerships with the business community often increase a university's visibility; similarly, outreach projects enhance the library's position on campus. This heightened awareness can provide justification for increased library funding to meet student demands for improved library services, such as real-time online reference service and wireless networking. For example, even before Kresge Library initiated its outreach projects, the University administration heard the students' voice when OU's Student Congress successfully petitioned to increase the library's base budget. By reaching out to an even broader student population, the librarians hope to inspire student advocacy for all of the enhanced services that the library could offer.

Continued marketing of library services to all student populations will surely strengthen in time, and this will make outreach efforts more valuable and far-reaching. When university enrollment is rising and retention is key, the library plays a vital role. Kresge Library is already at the physical center of the Oakland University campus. Through progressive outreach programs, librarians will promote the library as the academic center as well.

REFERENCES

1. Lynn Westbrook and Robert Waldman, "Outreach in Academic Libraries: Principle into Practice," *Research Strategies* 11, no. 2: 62.
2. Oakland University Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, *OU Data Book: Student Information 2002*, (November 26, 2002).
<http://aisnt.ais.oakland.edu/oira/Info_2002.htm>.
3. Westbrook and Waldman, 62.
4. Gail M. Staines, "Moving Beyond Institutional Boundaries: Perceptions toward BI for Transfer Students," *Research Strategies* 14 (spring 1996): 101.
5. Julie Still, "Library Services for Transfer Students," *Community & Junior College Libraries* 7 (1990): 52.
6. "Transfer Students Feel Disengaged from College Life, Survey Shows," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 (November 22, 2002): A55. Available online from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i13/13a05502.htm>.
7. Staines, 99.

8. Westbrook and Waldman, 62.

9. Isabel Espinal, "Multicultural Outreach in Academic Libraries." Paper presented at the American Library Association Annual Conference, Atlanta, Ga., June 2002.

10. Dana Keyse, *Kresge Library Diversity Resources*, (November 23, 2002).
<<http://www.kl.oakland.edu/DiversityResources/DiversityResources.html>>.

11. *Oakland University Residence Halls: Try Us and See*, (November 23, 2002).
<<http://www2.oakland.edu/reshalls/try.cfm/>>.

12. Melba Jesudason, "Outreach to Student-Athletes Through E-mail Reference Service," *Reference Services Review* 28, no. 3 (2000): 262-267.

13. *Spotlight on OU*, (October 19, 2002).
<<http://www3.oakland.edu/oakland/aboutou/spotlight.htm>>.