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More Than a Deckhand: Collaborating with Student Employees to Navigate the Collection Development Waters

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More Than A Deckhand: Collaborating with Student Employees to Navigate the Collection Development Waters

Background

Despite transformations in collection development workflows, librarians may find it challenging to devote enough time to varied collection-related projects like outreach and marketing, systematic weeding, evaluation, or use analysis.

At the same time, student employees seek opportunities for experiential learning and skill building that tie into their career interests. With some creative planning, a typical public services student position can accomodate these goals, in particular experience around teamwork, communication, or project management.

Developing collaborative projects with a mentoring framework can match your collection needs with students' personal paths, interests, and desires to contribute to the library mission in impactful ways.

Planning Tips

Create a project that is achievable in a limited, defined time period (e.g. a term, a month, something that will fit into a student work schedule). Think about learning outcomes and student capabilities.

Scope the role of the librarian and develop project milestones that serve as learning moments. Strategize about details such as regular communication, training needs, assessment, system permissions, partners, workspace, etc.

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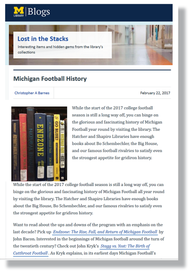
LIBRARY

Project Examples: From Displays and Selection to Collection Creation



Blog Posts

Project summary: Students write posts about items in collections reflecting current interests, new additions, reporting on outreach projects, etc.

Skills: Blogging technology, communication, outreach techniques.

Outreach Activities

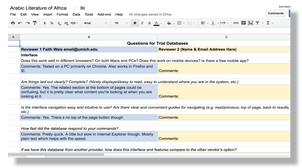
Project summary: Students create and lead engagement activities, like polls, to gather information that informs collection strengths and gaps. They also create bookmarks, flyers, or signs.

Skills: Communication, outreach techniques, teamwork

Book Displays

Project Summary: Students curate displays based on themes, identified independently or in collaboration with library staff around campus programs (e.g. African American History Month, U-M history, video games, elections, etc.). They create signage or digital screen content to market displays. collaborate with library staff to remove books from stacks to display shelves, and so on.

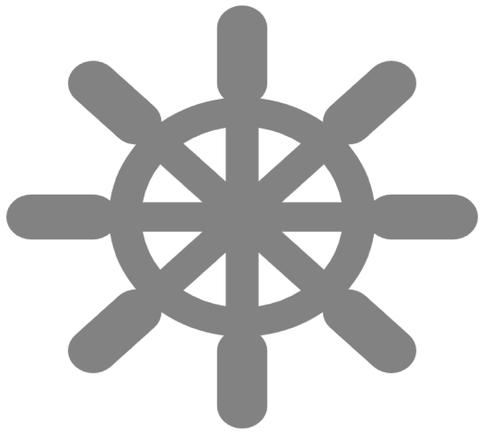
Skills: Catalog searching, content evaluation, technology use, teamwork, communication, marketing.



Trial Database Evaluation

Project summary: Students conduct evaluations of online resources under consideration for purchase or subscription. They provide evaluative content to collections librarians and training on this process to new student employees.

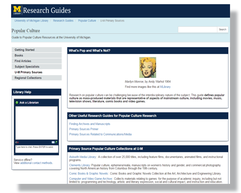
Skills: Communication, team work, exposure to new library resources and new technologies, critical thinking, leadership, project management.



Collection Creation

Project summary: Students review circulation data, research publisher information, and selection tools to weed and identify new editions and new titles. They investigate comparable collections, and campus needs. Build a small collection area.

Skills: Leadership, communication, teamwork, technology, exposure to new library resources, critical thinking, understand scholarly landscape and publishing environment.



LibGuides Creation & Maintenance

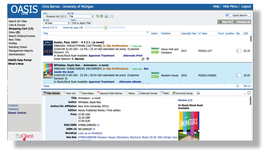
Project summary: Students edit LibGuides for broken links, update content in established guides (e.g. Women in Comics, Basic Reference Resources), and create guides for topical areas represented in collections (e.g. College & Career Success Collection).

Skills: Communication, teamwork, use of content management systems, exposure to new library resources, critical thinking, resource evaluation.

Weeding

Project summary: Students conduct evaluation of selected sections of collections based on agreed upon criteria. They review circulation data, create and assess results of user surveys, and recommend replacement copies or new editions.

Skills: Communication, teamwork, exposure to library technology, exposure to new library resources, critical thinking, user research, ability to use subject expertise.



Selection

Project summary: Students research publisher information and review lists and selection tools to identify titles for possible purchase. They also assist in writing collection statements/policy.

Skills: Leadership, communication, teamwork, exposure to library technology, exposure to new library resources, critical thinking, budgeting, understand scholarly landscape and publishing environment.

What We Learned

Students develop a deeper expertise with library tools and resources which they can apply to their own coursework.

Librarians build leadership and mentoring skills while simultaneously making real progress towards collection goals.

Librarians can count on concentrated help with larger projects and accomplish more of them.

LIS students get the chance for specialized experiences and take on professional responsibilities beyond the classroom.

Scaffolding student projects enables them to gradually increase their responsibilities and build their professional confidence.

Personal Outcomes

"The opportunity to work on several collections related projects ... has been of enormous benefit both in providing me with a hands-on learning environment in which to put into practice the theory I learned in my courses, as well as the confidence and experience as I apply to jobs in anticipation of my graduation."

- Faith Weis

"The most valuable parts of working on collection development projects ... were learning how to collaborate with new colleagues within and outside of the library, meeting tight deadlines, and making decisions based on active use in a large academic library."

- Alix Norton

"Creating the college success collection ... was a really great opportunity for me to try to get in the minds of our target patrons, to seek to understand their motivations and struggles, ... to identify the barriers and aspirations that might bring them to a certain subject heading or book cover."

- Christina Czuhajewski