October 1, 2011

Winning on the Road: Our Game Plan for the Temporary Closure of Hardin Library

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Winning on the Road: Our Game Plan for the Temporary Closure of Hardin Library

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Abstract
Earlier this year, Hardin Library for the Health Sciences seized an opportunity for dramatic facility improvement that would necessitate closure of the building for the summer. Our library, while not as busy during the summer as during the academic year, is active year-round. The Colleges of Dentistry and Medicine only break for a few weeks in the summer and those students need access to computers and resources. Although there are fewer users coming into the library, it is the time when many faculty do research, when medical students study for the USMLE, and when some programs conduct comprehensive exams requiring access to the collection.

In the midst of the chaos, we found opportunity: a chance to prove we were more than just a building. During our closure, we attempted to maintain as many of our services as possible. To do so, we embedded librarians in health sciences colleges, we established satellite reference desks, and we worked with the Sciences branch library to give students a place to study during the evening hours. We planned for an increase in ILL and we developed a strategy for circulating our print collection to patrons upon request. These activities allowed us to maintain our services as well as remaining visible to our patrons, while reinforcing to both staff and users that the library is not bound by our building.

Lessons Learned

- **Timelines are variable, and delivery dates may change, so we have been learning to be both agile and adaptable in our service delivery:** We returned to our building on schedule, but with more renovations than expected left to complete. One floor of the library did not open to the public for more than six weeks after our return.

- **Staff will surprise you with their flexibility and creativity:** They planned how to use the temporary space given us in the Colleges of Medicine and Pharmacy and devised a plan for retrieving needed materials from the construction zone. Most were so happy to return to our building at the end of the summer that they didn’t mind the temporary lighting and lack of ceiling tile.

- **A changed environment leads to a change in staff dynamics:** Much of the staff was relocated to shared space at the campus Main Library. Staff who rarely interacted got to know one another and gain a greater appreciation for others’ roles.

- **Our patrons are both smart and tolerant of chaos:** Students writing comprehensive exams in Communication Sciences and Disorders didn’t panic; in fact, they worked with us to develop a way to retrieve their needed materials more quickly.

- **Our patrons are both smart and tolerant of chaos:** At the end of the summer, users were happy to be able to return to the building, and put up with a less than ideal environment.

- **Sometimes, patrons are too smart:** Although we placed lots of signs and temporary physical barriers to prevent users from going up to still-closed fourth floor of the library, a number of users still found a way to get upstairs, resulting in the need to post a “guard” at one stairwell.

- **Communication is a critical element for success:** We used physical signage at our temporary locations and virtual signage on our website to keep our users informed. We discovered that some users refused to believe we were actually closed and would walk right around the large signs we had outside the building.

- **All document delivery requests became, by default, interlibrary loan requests:** Users were pleased that we were willing to provide this continuity of service to them, and seemed very satisfied with it.