'Friending' The Library: Social Media Interns Get the Message Out

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#NercompPDO3
In fall 2013 we drafted a job description for a student ambassador to work with the library and provide a student perspective on library services and space. Before we could advertise for the position, we were approached by a faculty member who had a student who was interested in getting her MLS and wanted experience working in a library. After sharing our job description with her and interviewing her, we offered her the inaugural library intern position for the spring 2014 semester for 2 credits. We emphasized that it was a work in progress and that the position was fluid and could change as the semester went on.
So Kimberly was our first intern. She was a senior who was an English major so she brought writing experience plus experience using the library with her. What we really wanted from an intern was a student voice in how the library was presented, on social media, on our website, and around campus.

"When I arrived the librarians here weren't quite sure what to do with me, as I was the first intern they had ever had. This was a learning experience for all of us. After sitting down to discuss the best course of action with Maureen and Pamela, it was finally decided that I would intern under the direction of Pamela in the Digital Services Department of the Library. And I am glad I did."

Kimberly, Our 1st Intern
One of Kim’s biggest projects during her internship was redoing our old video tour of the library. In her words “With the help of my photography background, a good friend, and some patience, I set out to recreate the video. It was a success and it currently resides on our website.” Kimberly also did usability testing on our website and accompanied me to roving reference sessions in the campus center.
Her main focus was on marketing and outreach and it became apparent quickly that social media would be a great place for her to focus her efforts. Kimberly launched an Instagram contest to get our fledgling Instagram account going. We raised our followers by 12 people during the time the contest ran.
The MCLA Tumblr page was created and launched by Kimberly and she was given sole control over it’s content with some suggestions by myself. Kimberly’s efforts focused on our local history and college archive collections. All Tumblr posts linked back to our Twitter page, which was doing well with followers. Kimberly went on to graduate from MCLA that spring and got a job in marketing at MassMoCA the following year. I served as a reference for her application for that position.
Diana came to us from the same professor that had suggested Kimberly as an intern. Diana too wants to get her MLS. She was a sophomore when she interned for us and spent an entire academic year working at our library, rather than just a semester. She is also an English major and heads the book club on campus.
Diana took to Tumblr right away. She posted regularly throughout the week, featuring an app of the week, a database of the week and a local history or college archive posting once a week. She did periodic postings like Meet the Librarians as well.
Despite my reluctance to incorporate a Facebook account into our social media, Diana convinced me that Facebook was still an important part of the students’ days and were they got most of their news so she set one up for us and helped write content for the page. She was particularly interested in making the hours available to students and to have a way to update students about changes in the regular hours.
Diana ran two contests to increase use of Instagram and Twitter among our students. The make 3 wishes contest was very successful and gave us a list of items that we could address in the library’s short and long term plans.
She also created new signs that were posted around campus and table tents for the dining hall to promote all our social media accounts.
Diana has a strong public library streak in her and really wanted to do some book displays in the library. I let her have at it and she came up with about 5 book displays over the course of the academic year. They often involved very intricate banners which we have kept. Sometimes she tied them into our other social media, displaying the books on Pinterest or posting pictures of the displays to Instagram. Diana is currently studying abroad in London and when she returns she is going to intern at the public library in town. I encouraged her to get some public library experience as well to see the difference between that and an academic library.
More importantly than the numbers is that we probably would not have presence on social media on many of these platforms if it weren’t for our interns. It also gave us a jumping off point on what kind of material to present and how frequently to present it. It also allowed us to provide real library experience for our students. I was really proud of the content our students produced and the amount of effort and thought they put into their projects.

Results

- Instagram has 67 followers
- Facebook has 70 followers
- Tumblr has 31 followers
- Twitter has 235 followers
- Pinterest has 134 followers
Questions?

Contact me at p.contakos@mcla.edu or @elalibrarian on Twitter

Online evaluation
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