Get to Know Your Librarian: How a Simple Orientation Program Helped Alleviate Library Anxiety

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Abstract

Library orientations do their part to familiarize students with information literacy, and how the library fits within university life. But what if an orientation could give a student a strong introduction to their academic librarians? Research in academic libraries has noted that library anxiety remains a continual problem among current students. Valparaiso University librarians created the *Get to Know Your Librarian* program, which sought to make librarians accessible. Using humor and casualness, incoming students were “introduced” to librarians through a series of fun facts. This simple program, was successful in helping alleviate incoming students’ library anxiety before their first semester.

Keywords: Public Services, Outreach, freshmen orientation, library anxiety
Introduction

Ever since Constance Mellon’s landmark 1986 study first named the phenomenon, library anxiety has been part of the lexicon. Her study named and detailed what librarians had been observing: namely that, similar to math and test anxiety, students had feelings of negativity and discomfort when seeking to use the library and its resources. Her data also found that students took something unexpected away from the traditional one-shot instruction session: the personal interaction with librarians made students less anxious about the library. Mellon’s library redesigned their orientation session as a “warmth seminar” in which, while still teaching a library instruction session, the “primary goal is to help students see the library as a great place with fascinating information and warm, friendly people available to help them” (Mellon, p. 164-165). The librarians at Valparaiso University have attempted to alleviate library anxiety by using the idea of these warmth seminars in a simple freshmen orientation program that helped these incoming students to get to know their librarians.

Mellon’s study was followed by Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale (1992) which became the standard scale to demonstrate library anxiety. The Bostick Scale separated library anxiety into five elements: barriers with staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library, knowledge of the library, and mechanical barriers. The largest of these elements was barriers with staff - where students stated they felt librarians were too busy to help them, and too unfriendly or intimidating to approach. While the Bostick Scale has been used in most studies dealing with library anxiety, it has also been adapted to fit more specific populations. These new studies may list different elements on their scales, but the majority still have the issue of barriers with staff as one of the top problems for students experiencing library anxiety (Anwar, Al-Qallaf, Al-Kandari, & Al-Ansari, 2001; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997). Many libraries try to make incoming students
familiar with the building and aware of library resources as a way to make these students comfortable. This paper posits that the library as building and resource collection could almost be taken out of the equation altogether in terms of addressing students’ library anxiety; showing that librarians are accessible, approachable people first and foremost will help alleviate student stress.

**Library Anxiety**

Students having issues with using the library is not a recent idea. Even before Mellon named library anxiety, librarians had been observing the phenomenon. In 1972, Swope and Katzer’s survey showed not only that students felt a level of anxiety in the library, but also that the reasons behind the anxiety were that they did not want to bother the librarian, and/or they felt foolish over the level of their question/knowledge. This reasoning is echoed in today’s students as well. Numerous studies show that students are reluctant to approach librarians due to fear of looking ignorant or a worry that they will disturb a busily working librarian (Bostick, 1992; Hatchard & Toy, 1986; Hernon & Pastine, 1977; Massey-Burzio, 1998; McPherson, 2015; Mellon, 1986; and Ruppel & Fagan, 2002). Hatchard and Toy (1986) found that a common feeling was one of being uncomfortable around library staff due to a lack of relationship with them. They also found that librarians are expected to possess an almost superhuman combination of qualities to begin this student/librarian relationship: “Above all else, [the librarians] must be out-going, friendly, approachable, able to make users comfortable, and have communication skills. Library personnel must also be helpful, patient and have a sound knowledge of all the library’s resources” (Hatchard & Toy, 1986, p. 67).

There are differing levels of comfort within types of libraries. Massey-Burzio (1998) looked at focus groups of academic library users, and found that patrons did not like asking
questions and were worried that they would seem ignorant if they did. Her study also found that these patrons felt they already knew how to use the library and its resources and that they were confident in this knowledge. However, she found that most patrons had trouble with basic library and research skills. Antell (2004) found that some students would avoid the academic library in favor of the public library for questions, due to the perceived helpfulness and friendliness of the librarians there. Onwuegbuzie, Jiao and Bostick’s definitive tome on the topic, *Library Anxiety: Theory, Research, and Applications*, detailed three categories of library anxiety intervention and prevention: “facility and resource oriented…knowledge based…and human assisted” (2004, p. 237). This final category involved librarians and their ability to intercede with students in terms of roving reference and research assistance: academic librarians making themselves available at the information point of need. An open house was also suggested in terms of making students familiar with the library as a place and librarians could be a part of that by interacting with students during the event.

Van Scocoyoc (2003) compared the views of students who were taught bibliographic instruction by a librarian to those who learned via computer-assisted instruction. She found that those students who had experienced the human component of being taught by library staff had significantly less library anxiety than their counterparts. These students also “reported significantly less barriers with staff library anxiety compared to those students who completed the computer-based tutorial” (p. 337). Personal contact with a librarian was also found to be preferable at Kent State, where librarians discovered that students who received “personalized attention” from librarians actually ended up being, “more inclined to ask for more services and instruction” (Eschedor Voelker, 2006, p. 78). In her study on the help-seeking behaviors of undergraduates, Pellegrino (2012) observed that when students have made a personal connection
with a librarian, it helped them to find all librarians accessible. Clearly, the human touch is preferred and makes both the library and librarians more accessible.

**Warmth, Informality and Accessibility**

Recent psychological research echoes this need for humans to perceive warmth to form a positive connection. Fiske, Cuddy and Glick (2006) found that “warmth judgements are primary: warmth is judged before competence, and warmth judgements carry more weight in affective and behavioral reactions” (p. 77). While students may perceive librarians as competent due purely to the nature of their positions of authority within the university library, the perception of warmth is more important to convey, “friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness and morality” (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006, p. 77). Not only does this fulfill the charge given by Hatchard and Toy, and Mellon, but this combination of traits is the most likely to alleviate student library anxiety. Research has demonstrated that people equate approachability with trustworthiness (Willis, Dodd & Palermo, 2013). The more approachable librarians are, the more students may trust them for help.

Many libraries may have signage that identifies librarians; this in itself leads to accessibility. The sociological term for this is “mere exposure,” a term used mostly in the advertising industry, which was coined in the late 1960s. “Mere exposure” defines the phenomenon when a person’s attitude toward something can be changed if that person has been exposed to the object repeatedly (Zajonc, 1968). Library signage that shows images of librarians and lists their subject or reference areas are frequently placed in prominent areas to ensure the maximum amount of views by students. It is here that the mere exposure effect comes into play.
A level of informality can help reach beyond mere exposure to further student outreach; something unusual or humorous can potentially break through the sameness that is signage. Informality can also lead to a sense of approachability. In their study of business students’ perceptions of professors, Sebastian and Bristow (2008) found that formal dress was seen as less likeable and trustworthy (p. 200). There is an argument to be made that informality in general can make a person seem likeable and trustworthy. Although speaking of writing centers rather than libraries, Sherwood (1993) makes the point that laughter and humor can ease tensions brought on by the writing center experience (threats to self-esteem, authority figure fears, intimidation) that echo library anxiety. He finds that, “humor can build a bridge” between a student and the person trying to help them, and, “can distance students from their fears” (p. 4). If a student has seen a librarian in a more light-hearted capacity, they may be more willing to ask that librarian a question or for research help later on in their college careers. By instilling this level of accessibility in their minds during freshmen orientation, academic library anxiety may be avoided.

Opportunities for Libraries in Freshmen Orientation

The first impressions that students have of a university are critical, and the ones they have of the academic library, its resources, and services can also shape student opinions. Much like Mellon’s warmth seminars, Collins and Dodsworth (2011) state that comfort sessions could take place during orientation week, making students feel welcome but also making a connection with and piquing interest in the library. Brown, Weingart, Johnson, & Dance (2004) provided incoming students with a scavenger hunt at freshmen orientation, with the purpose of making the students familiar with the library and librarians, and to raise their comfort level and combat library anxiety. The activity was purposefully “light-hearted” (p. 395). While it did not seem
that the freshmen had much library anxiety to begin with (or at least did not report it), there was a reduction in library anxiety, even with a small, informal interaction. Hernon and Pastine (1977) found that many students wanted more personal contact with a librarian, which would make them feel more comfortable, and that they preferred a level of informality.

Orientations for new students that include the library can help forge a positive relationship with the library, and librarians, before students arrive on campus in the fall (Rhoades & Hartsell, 2008). Many library orientations include introducing the students to the library’s resources and services in various engaging ways (Cahoy & Bichel, 2004; Miller & Cooper, 2014; Noe, 2016). There is precedent for a non-instruction based orientation to the academic library, however. Penn State University Libraries have an annual open house event that, “focuses on fun, play, and personal interaction to reduce students’ fear of the library” (Cahoy & Bichel, 2004, p.50). Their annual two day event has the ultimate goal of positive interactions between librarians and students which would embolden students to come to the library when they need research help. The University at Albany, State University of New York library also has a large, successful, annual event with the purpose of engaging new and returning students (Anderson, 2012). On the other hand, Currie (2009) had limitations during Hope College’s student orientation. Originally, the librarians personally met with the incoming class over a period of a business week. With only five librarians, and an average incoming class of 800, this was not sustainable and soon turned into a video to welcome the incoming class.

The valiant information literacy efforts are certainly justified, but the librarians at Valparaiso University’s Christopher Center Library have chosen not to make that a priority. Christopher Center Library Services (CCLS) endeavors to make students feel comfortable with the library and the librarians, echoing the goals of Mellon’s “warmth seminars.” CCLS,
however, is not able to replicate the two day orientation bonanza of a much larger school with (presumably) a much larger budget and workforce. CCLS librarians had to come up with an orientation to the library and librarians that was both fun and succinct, without spending much money. From these restrictions, came the Get to Know Your Librarian activity.

Background

Valparaiso University (Valpo) is a Midwestern, medium-sized, comprehensive university, with an FTE of 4200. CCLS is a medium-sized department, with eleven full time librarians including the dean. CCLS has successfully campaigned to be part of the annual freshmen orientation, called FOCUS, which occurs on five separate occasions within the month of June. On the first evening of the two-day orientation, incoming students (known from here as students) and their parents select two programs out of six to attend. Sessions include introductions to academic support resources, sports and health, campus involvement, study abroad, and internships and career planning as well as to the library. Amongst this highly competitive field, the library’s session averages 15% of incoming student attendees. These sessions take place at the end of a very busy day full of a tremendous amount of information and before the day that the students register for classes, an activity of great concern for many students.

CCLS leads their programs with two tracks: one for students and one for parents, each administered by a librarian. The original concept for this dual programming was to give the students a break from the overload of information they had been receiving and probably would not retain. The program for parents gives the opportunity to understand the nuances of an academic library: to be prepared when their students ask them questions instead of asking a librarian. CCLS offers students warmth rather than information saturation, at that overwhelming
moment. For many years, the purpose of the student program was to simply familiarize the students with the library building and the departments held within it. This approach was based on a study in *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education*, that spoke about how students reach out to their parents first when in need of research assistance (“Study examines the impact of the ‘electronic tether,’” 2006). For the past two years, the student program has been set up as a way to introduce the librarians, and make them seem more accessible, without necessarily meeting the students face-to-face.

**Methodology**

With the goal of alleviating library anxiety in students during orientation, CCLS looked to accomplish this with a small budget and even smaller time commitment from busy librarians. It was determined, looking at multidisciplinary literature, that the warmth Mellon recommended to fight library anxiety could be combined with a level of informality and fun, in a quick and easy program. The program would introduce the librarians’ faces as well as facets of their personalities. Every CCLS librarian has an *Ask Me!* sign, which includes their name, photograph and subject areas. For the FOCUS programming, each sign had the addition of a paper speech bubble with five fun facts about each librarian, such as, “My favorite dinosaur is the triceratops!” or “I have a secret passageway in my house, and a secret room” (see Figure 1). Since the *Ask Me!* signs were a pre-existing element, the only thing required of the librarians were for each to come up with five fun facts. These facts were conveyed over email and it took less than an hour to design, create, attach the paper speech bubbles to the *Ask Me!* signs, and then distribute the signs throughout all four floors of the library.

A survey was created to capture the students’ feelings toward librarians and library anxiety. Questions were based upon the needs of the activity and literature which contextualized
library anxiety on feelings of discomfort around library staff. The survey’s questions sought to determine the students’ feelings toward the library and views on academic librarians, as well as asking them to self-identify any experiences of library anxiety. Valpo’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was consulted due to the contact with human subjects and approval obtained. The *Get to Know Your Librarian* handout included an anonymous pre- (four questions) and post-activity (three questions) survey, asking the students’ feelings on academic librarians and library anxiety (see Appendix). IRB approval was contingent on the students’ ages: only those students who were 18 years and above were asked to fill out the survey, those under 18 were instructed to ignore those questions.

When the library’s FOCUS session began, students entered the classroom expecting to hear a lecture about the library’s resources. Instead, they were told by a librarian that they were going to be let loose in the building, looking for facts about each librarian. The students were shown an example of one of the speech bubbled *Ask Me!* signs and given the handout. For those who were age-eligible to take the survey, instructions were provided. Eligible students filled out the pre-activity survey questions. Students were then released into the library to find the *Ask Me!* signs, which were scattered across all four floors with candy at each station. The *Get to Know Your Librarian* activity required students to write down one fun fact and one subject area for each librarian. Completion of the activity would allow the students to enter a raffle for a $10 university bookstore gift card; the drawing took place at the end of each session. Students gathered back in the classroom after filling out their activity sheets, and the eligible students filled out the three remaining survey questions.

Unlike other orientation events, such as active learning exercises, self-guided tours, and introduction to the library resources, the CCLS orientation steered clear of introducing any
research concepts, including library resources, save that librarians were good resources themselves. The entire purpose of the student library program at FOCUS was to introduce these students to the librarians, to get them to regard librarians as people, and hopefully have the students forge a connection which would lessen library anxiety. The librarians who headed the student program reported overall feelings of goodwill, with students often commenting on facts or asking follow-up questions. The anonymous survey revealed even more of those thoughts and feelings.

**Results and Interpretation**

During this two year study, the survey was distributed and collected from 236 students, out of a possible 1983 overall student FOCUS attendees. The survey participation rate among students who attended the session was high. Since the *Get to Know Your Librarian* activity hinged on the worksheet the survey accompanied, the participation rate was 89.8%. The only students who did not fill out the survey were underage and could not participate. In context of the total group of students attending FOCUS, the survey participation rate was 12% of incoming students.

Students were asked questions designed to gauge their impressions of the library and librarians. The first question established their previous relationship with an academic library, asking, “Is this your first time in an academic library?” The ratio of students who had not been in an academic library to those who had was 2.6:1. Of students surveyed, 71% stated this was the first time they had been to an academic library, while 27% had previous experience and 1% did not answer. For incoming freshmen whose previous library experience was likely within school or public libraries, these numbers were unsurprising.
Students were next asked, “What were your feelings as you entered the building?” Their responses also elaborated on their experiences. Answers were coded as one of three ways: positive, negative, and neutral. Despite the fact that more than half of the students had never previously been to an academic library, 38% of their recorded feelings on entering the building were positive, while only 11% were negative and 4% were neutral. Some students answered the question as if it were asking their opinion on the library building and not their emotions, but this number was also strongly positive (see Table 1). At least one student comment echoed sentiments of library anxiety: the student felt, “nervious [sic], like I don’t fit in there.”

When asked, “What do you think when you picture an academic librarian?”, students’ responses ran the gamut, from positive to negative and from original to stereotypical. Just as was seen above with the responses about entering the building, these responses were also mostly positive, although the ratio was smaller, 1.8:1 positive to negative (see Table 2). Although this was an open ended question, there were many responses that were similar. Those words or phrases that were recorded more than once were coded as specific traits, and further coded as positive or negative. All other singular responses were coded only as positive or negative. Positive attributes mentioned included that librarians were nice, knowledgeable/intelligent, helpful, and that the students saw them as scholarly or academic people who could help with research. One student called an academic librarian a “really smart version of a normal librarian” while another stated an academic librarian is “a regular librarian with more advanced knowledge, perhaps on a specific subject.” This positivity could be linked to the type of student who would self-select a library program during their orientation, but this correlation cannot be made without further research outside the scope of this paper.
There were also students who attempted to make positive statements, but these were filled with misinformation. They believed that academic librarians are people who:

- “help with computers”
- “studied a specific field of literature”
- “memorized where a majority of the books belong”

While these were positive declarations, the mistakes semi-negate them. Librarian stereotypes also reared their ugly heads, with 20% of responses mentioning glasses, 17% identifying librarians as female (as opposed to 2% as male), and there was mention of librarians being boring, old, mean, and strict. Six responders felt that librarians shushed people. Academic librarians were described as

- “an old, mean lady”
- “mean and unapproachable”
- “someone who ‘shushes’ people all the time”
- an “old lady w/grey hair & cat-eye glasses”

While it is encouraging to note that many librarian stereotypes no longer dominate the minds of students, it is disheartening to see that any of the stereotypes still exist.

The fourth pre-activity question was preceded by a brief definition of library anxiety. Students were asked if they had ever experienced library anxiety as it was defined here: a fear of using the library or fear of approaching a librarian for help. While this is a rudimentary definition of the phenomenon, the question was deliberately worded for simplicity. The results indicated that 56% of students felt they had not experienced library anxiety, as opposed to the 48% who responded they had. While the majority of students responded primarily in the
affirmative or negative, some did elaborate on their answers. Those who did admit to feeling library anxiety, felt it in the traditional ways detailed in the literature. Students had feelings of library anxiety:

- “on occasion, only because I feel like I’m annoying the librarian”
- “a few times (when the librarian looked busy)”
- “yes when I thought the question was silly”
- “yes, because I don’t know where to start”

The known types of library anxiety, how the phenomenon is felt, have really not changed since the first notations of it in the 1970s. Today’s students still feel their questions are not worth bothering a perceived busy librarian.

Once the students had completed the Get to Know Your Librarian activity and returned to the classroom, the post-activity survey sought to document feelings toward librarians and anxiety after learning the fun facts about library faculty. The students were asked “Now that you know these facts about the librarians, what do you think of them?” The analysis of responses lead to coding students’ answers into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. The responses were overwhelmingly affirmative, with 94% of students responding in this positive manner when asked what they now thought of academic librarians. In fact, the pre- and post-activity survey revealed that 100% of the students who previously had negative perceptions of academic librarians, changed those views to positive after the activity (see Table 3). The most common response was “they are people too,” with a full 13% of students mentioning the phrase or that they could relate to librarians as “normal people” or “human beings.” One student wrote: “They
are just like any other person and not the scary librarians everyone thinks they are.” Students also stated that now the librarians:

- “feel more approachable to me”
- “feel like theyre [sic] just like us and I would feel more comfortable talking to them”
- “seem more personal & friendly”
- “it would be easier to approach them since I know these facts”

The librarians’ diversity was cited often. Another trend was students being surprised by the librarians’ credentials: “I did not realize how qualified they were.” At its best, the fun facts alleviated library anxiety a bit and dispelled some of the librarian stereotypes. As one student put it: “I think it put into perspective that they’re regular people, too & that even men can be librarians (not to be sexist!) It helped me throw out the fear a little.”

Students were then asked if they felt they were acquainted with the librarians through the fun facts even though they did not physically meet them. The vast majority of the respondents stated either yes or slightly (89%), compared to the 7% that said no. Student comments ranged from those who felt they were acquainted with the librarians:

- “the facts and information were like a formal introduction”
- “it feels like we were told about them by one of their friends”

to those who thought it was a good start:

- “I feel intrigued by them; I don’t feel like I know them, but I would like to meet and get to know them”
- “I feel that I would not hesitate as much to ask for help”
to those who did not feel it was enough:

- “I would need to speak to them face to face”
- “I’ve been introduced to the group as a whole, but no, I don’t feel acquainted with them yet”

Similarly, as evidenced in the final question about person-to-person contact with a librarian, the majority of responses indicated that the students would prefer personal interaction to make them feel less anxious about using the library. When asked “Would person-to-person contact with a librarian potentially make you feel less anxious about using the library?”, students responded 78% yes, 11% no, and 8% were unsure. Students stated that would make them feel:

- “more comfortable”
- “more inclined to talk to them and ask for help”
- “Meeting all of the librarians in person would make using them as resources much less intimidating”

The majority of the results boiled down to this: the students stated that they were not anxious to begin with, but that getting to know the librarians through the photographs and fun facts did alleviate some sort of anxiety.

Discussion

Students did not overwhelmingly self-identify as experiencing library anxiety, but 48% of students surveyed did state they had feelings of anxiety while using the library. The disparity could potentially be explained by the Dunning-Kruger Effect, which states that people tend to be overconfident when recounting their skills – an overestimation when compared to their legitimate performance (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Newer studies have found this
overconfidence to have increased over generations, with Millennials demonstrating the highest measured levels of self-esteem, which leads to this overestimation of abilities (Moore & Healy, 2008; Twenge, Campbell & Gentile, 2012). Similarly, there have been studies on how students overestimate their information literacy skills (Kurbanoglu, 2003; Mahmood, 2016; Molteni & Chan, 2015). Many of these studies focus on undergraduates who are particularly overconfident of their academic research skills (Angell & Kose, 2015; Freeman, 2004; Gustavson & Nall, 2011).

If a student feels confident in their abilities to use a library, they may not feel that library anxiety is a real issue for them. The combination of this trend of overconfidence with the tendency of students to overestimate their information literacy skills lends itself to the underreporting of library anxiety levels. Whether or not the students wanted to admit feelings of library anxiety, there seemed to be an underlying current of it. As one student stated, “Librarians don’t make me very anxious, but knowing more about the Librarians [sic] makes me less hesitant to ask for help.”

Similar to Mellon’s “warmth seminars,” CCLS’ efforts at FOCUS aimed to make the students more comfortable with librarians as individuals. Mellon stressed the importance of the interaction between librarian and student. CCLS librarians were able to make this interaction happen even without meeting face-to-face. The objective of having students learn fun facts about the librarians was to make the librarians more accessible. Not every librarian could commit to participating in an orientation program, but students learned something personal about each librarian nonetheless. In Pellegrino’s study, her students suggested connecting the librarians’ names with a photograph and a list of subject areas, which would make them seem
less intimidating (2012, p. 276). That student suggestion is what the CCLS librarians’ Ask Me! signs currently do; the addition of the fun facts encourages a personal connection.

It is disheartening to see that the stereotypes seen since the first studies of student perceptions of academic librarians still persist today. In 1977, Hernon and Pastine found that students saw librarians as “little old ladies” who “keep the library in order” (p. 132-133). The results found at FOCUS show those stereotypes are still alive and well. However, the facts themselves and the interaction with librarians can help dispel these librarian stereotypes. Students would return from the fact finding activity many times with follow-up questions about the facts or statements of interest in discussing the facts with a specific librarian. They were also intrigued that librarians did original research and that their participation would be incorporated into a research project by taking the survey. This type of interest in the librarians and what they do helps to dispel these stereotypes.

The level of informality seen in the fun facts was a planned and important part of the program. CCLS librarians wanted the students to see them as likeable and trustworthy, and the facts were designed to have the ease and humor to do just that. The results of the survey show that, for the most part, this goal was met. Hopefully the feelings of warmth and familiarity will remain with the student as they enter the university. While the fun facts are not a permanent fixture of the signage, the hope is that those orientation students will remember the feelings of positivity and fun when they see the librarians’ faces on these signs. The past exposure to the facts should trigger a favorable emotion toward CCLS librarians, which would make them more approachable and create an overall feeling of comfort within the environment of the library (Miles, 2009). The mere exposure to the librarians could also help those in times of stress. Schick, McGlynn and Woolham (1972) found that those with a high level of anxiety were drawn
to that which was familiar rather than to that which was new. The simple act of being introduced to the librarians in this informal way could help alleviate library anxiety and propel those who are the most anxious to ask a question rather than avoid the librarian.

Previous CCLS research has found that students respond well to the sociological concept of the familiar stranger. Based on the concept of Milgram’s familiar stranger - the familiarity felt among strangers when they notice each other frequently in the same location (1977) - CCLS librarians observed that students interacted without having formal relationships or introductions. Within the context of displays/exhibits in the academic library, CCLS librarians observed that students would interact with each other via the displays on the second floor lobby of the library without ever meeting those people face to face (Muszkiewicz, 2015). The Ask Me! signs parallel this phenomenon by familiarizing students with the librarians by means of mere exposure to signage, which begins to build a relationship without having that face-to-face meeting. The fun facts revealed about the librarians during FOCUS provide a unique introduction and further solidification of that relationship. When a student can recall a librarian’s face with the fun fact about them, the stranger becomes even more familiar, and the librarian becomes that much more accessible. If the Get to Know Your Librarian activity does what it is fully intended to do, the fun facts bridge the gap between the familiar stranger and a personal relationship by showing the student that the librarians are accessible, that the librarians are “people too.”

Conclusion

A library program at freshmen orientation should not be the only outreach effort to mitigate library anxiety; indeed relieving this anxiety should be something that librarians do in their daily practice. It has been demonstrated that a simple program, such as Get to Know Your Librarian, can have a positive effect in regards to library anxiety. A program such as this, which
does not require a significant time or budget commitment, is very easy to create and make part of the library’s outreach initiatives. Overthinking an issue as large and complex as library anxiety is easy to do, but the programs that librarians have the time, budget, and level of creative expression to achieve don’t have to be difficult. Sometimes simplicity is best.

There is no one way to address library anxiety and librarian accessibility in all students - no two students are alike nor do they feel the same way. No matter the underlying cause of library anxiety, it is up to librarians themselves to address and alleviate it. As Swoop and Katzer said in 1972, “Eye contact, a sincere smile, and an invitation to return will do wonders with a hesitant individual” (p. 165). Certainly grand gestures like eye-catching graphics and events can provide the warmth students need to be comfortable with the library, but so too can small, simple programs. The key is making librarians accessible. Getting to know librarians on an individual level, especially informally, can do just that.
Works Cited


Appendix

FOCUS Survey Questions

Pre-Activity:

Is this your first time in an academic library?

What were your feelings as you entered the building?

What do you think of when you picture an academic librarian?

Library Anxiety is basically a fear of using the library, or fear of approaching a librarian for help. Have you ever felt this way?

Post-Activity:

Now that you know these facts about the librarians, what do you think about them?

Even though you didn’t meet all the librarians tonight, do you feel as if you are acquainted with them through the pictures/facts?

Would person-to-person contact with a librarian potentially make you less anxious about using the library?