2013

Partnering with Public Library Services: A Town and Gown Affair

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Abstract

This article describes the collaborative effort between academic reference and Public Library Services (PLS) in developing and sustaining a resume resources program at a joint-use library. The resume resources workshops are a part of the summer workshop series, Adult Computer Camp, organized by the PLS department at the Alvin Sherman Library (ASL) of Nova Southeastern University (NSU). The summer workshop series offers an innovative variety of workshops to the public featuring online and computer resources. These workshops have been a successful collaboration between these two departments at the ASL, a joint-use or "town and gown" library.

Keywords: Public library services; Resume resources

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."— Helen Keller

Introduction

The Reference department at NSU's Alvin Sherman Library Research and Information Technology Center (ASL) offers resume resources sessions to individuals of the public through a collaboration with the Public Library Services (PLS) department. These sessions, part of the summer "Adult Computer Camp" are offered to raise the awareness and encourage members of the public to use the library's resources to enhance their job search efforts by creating an effective resume, one of the most essential aspects of the job search process. In the past, the workshops were offered as group sessions, but were later restructured into individual, one-to-one sessions due to low group attendance and the personal nature of the job search process.

Joint Use Libraries

The ASL is a joint-use facility that is open to the public as well as NSU (Nova Southeastern University) students, faculty, and staff. ASL is one of four NSU Libraries that collaborates to be the premier research, cultural, and lifelong learning center for NSU and the community.[1] Community involvement has always been a prominent theme at the University's schools and centers since opening its doors in 1964.[2] Housed in the largest library building in the state of Florida, the ASL opened its doors to the public on December 8, 2001.[3] Through an agreement between the Broward County Board of County Commissioners and NSU, the ASL offers traditional public library services as well as access to NSU's full academic collection. Public library Services, located on the first floor of the building, has the distinct "kid-friendly" look and feel of any neighborhood public library.

Joint-use libraries, also known as "combined," "dual use," "co-managed" or "cooperative" libraries, are a unique form of library collaboration.[4] A more colloquial term is the "town and gown relationship."[5] Not surprisingly, this type of library is increasingly popular around the world.[6] Within this arrangement two separate library service providers use the same building to serve distinct clientele. The most common joint-use arrangement is a public library combined with a school library media center, or a public library combined with an academic library, but other forms do exist. Combining public and academic libraries often means integrating two related yet distinct missions, or at least allowing them to coexist. One of the main advantages of joint-use facilities is improving service to the community that offers access to academic resources.[7] Indeed, a major strength of joint use libraries is their strong community emphasis.[8]

Planning the Workshops

In the spirit of collaboration within a "town and gown" library, ASL's Reference department offers resume resources workshops to individuals of the public. These workshops are a part of the PLS department's exciting summer workshop series that covers ever-changing topics ranging from online banking to blogging. The goal is to enhance job search efforts and at the same time promote the relevant resources.

Planning for the entire summer workshop series begins in earnest as early as March of any given year. The PLS department determines the classes they will offer and begins to promote the offerings in April. The resume resources workshops are included in these promotional efforts through flyers and local newspaper ads targeting patrons of Broward County Library (BCL) branches. The events are also included in the library's online events calendar and closed-circuit TV ads within the library building.

The workshops are usually held in one of the library's several computer labs complete with overhead projector, presenter podium and computers available to the attendee. Once a computer lab is booked for all of the available session dates, this information is entered into the library's online calendaring system. The sessions are usually held once a week for about 10 weeks (June through August), with two sessions a day. So in total, patrons have about 20 possible options for attending a session. About a month before the sessions are to start, registration begins. Patrons have the option of calling or emailing the contact person listed in the calendar details to register for a session.

In anticipation of the sessions, the Reference department's LibGuide dedicated to careers is updated as is the PowerPoint presentation that profiles the various resume resources. Important updates to the presentation include making sure that all hyperlinks are operable and that the most up-to-date, useful resources are listed. Relevant handouts for featured resources are also updated and prepared for the session participant. Handouts include database tip sheets, LibGuide information and PowerPoint slides.

Executing the Workshops

On the day of a scheduled session, the computer lab is set up about a half an hour before the session begins. The PowerPoint presentation is displayed on the overhead projector and handouts are made ready for the attendee. The presentation is double-checked for broken links, current access to resources and ease of site navigation.

Once the patron has arrived and been welcomed, we ask about his/her expectations of the session and give a brief overview of what will be covered. These sessions are usually very informal in nature with casual back-and-forth banter. Since these are individual sessions, the presenter has the opportunity to guide the session based on the patron's stated needs and expectations. Asking the patron questions before and during the session has proven to be the most effective way to obtain a sense of his/her immediate and specific needs from the session. Most attendees are currently unemployed and in need of a way to efficiently update their resume using current, free technologies. Some are in a career transition period or are going back to work after years of being out of the work-force. Others are currently in school working towards a career in one field and in the meantime need to secure employment in another.

The presentation highlights several different popular sources for free resume templates, such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Office Online, and Google Docs. However, other less well-known sources for free templates are featured, such as Zoho Writer and JobStar Central. While the information is being presented, the patron is encouraged to navigate to the featured resources, including the library's website, to search for relevant books and to access database resources.

While searching and scanning the different templates, we ask the patron to consider which ones best fit their current employment situation. We also guide the patron in navigating such library database resources as Hoover's Company Profiiles, EBSCOhost Company Profiles, and Proquest ABI/Inform Complete to locate specific company information. These databases provide job seekers with company information that

can be invaluable for customizing their resumes according to the job they are seeking, as well as preparing for interviews.

Conclusion

ASL's resume workshops attract a wide variety of persons interested in revamping their resume, including students, those continuing their education, as well as persons transitioning into a new career. Perhaps the most eager are those who have been laid-off and express an urgent need to make sure they are presenting their best "face" to potential employers. Those re-entering the work-force after many years feel less sense of urgency, but rather a sense of trepidation about facing today's always changing arena of job hunting.

In order to assist our patrons with the often daunting challenge of preparing a resume, we make every effort to present relevant resources that are user-friendly and current. Before each series of workshops, the materials are fully updated to make certain our patrons can leave a session that much more confident in their ability to reach their goals.

Partnering with PLS in this way is an integral function of the Reference department at this "town and gown" library. It is one of the main goals of every department of the library to serve all patrons, whether academic or public. In fact, as a public facility, we serve all patrons who enter the building, even those who do not reside in the county we serve directly. In order to uphold this tacit agreement with the county and patrons we serve, we keep this goal in mind on a daily basis.

Endnotes

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