

Sex, SIN, and Dirty Books

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses various creative approaches used to involve faculty in library operations and to expand service both to faculty and students in an academic health sciences library.

THE Health Affairs Library of East Carolina University, commonly known as HAL, serves the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, and the School of Allied Health and Social Professions. The latter includes, in addition to the usual paramedical departments, a Department of Social Work and Corrections. Sex, SIN, and Dirty Books represent three dimensions of HAL service to its community. Sex represents HAL contributions to curriculum development, SIN represents HAL contributions to faculty research and Dirty Books is an example of HAL efforts to increase faculty involvement in library functions. The noun "affairs" might seem more appropriate in the context of the sentence; but we've been using the word infrequently ever since a student assistant related that when asked what she did in the Health Affairs Library, she always replied, "I conduct healthy affairs."

Like most libraries, HAL has a faculty committee to foster faculty involvement. Also, as faculty members, HAL librarians take part in a variety of educational activities which bring them into constant contact with other faculty members, they stay aware of curricular develop-

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ments, and they participate in the development of the Division of Health Affairs and of the University as a whole. Faculty members are, of course, consulted in the acquisition process for recommendations, and some of them even use the library services quite frequently. The Dirty Books project typifies the quality of the relationship between the HAL staff and the Health Affairs community.

Project Dirty Books began with the following letter which was sent to all faculty members.

Once upon a time there was a place known as the HAL. To most people it was a place to study, photo-copy, and sometimes sleep. They saw only the clean light room, the new books, the technical journals, and the keepers of the HAL, known commonly as 'librarians.'

But there was another side of the HAL—a secret underworld, known only to the keepers and a few initiated seekers of the hidden truths of the ancients. Unbeknownst to the ordinary mortals who daily graced the tables of the HAL, the keepers had a treasure house of tainted, filthy, disgustingly dirty literature in which they eagerly each day anticipated debasing themselves.

At first they were reluctant to share their secret pleasures, but gradually they came to realize that they had accumulated a collection that was too great for even their ravenous appetites for the rank and foul of literature. They would have to allow others to jeopardize their purity through contact with these repellent sources of knowledge. So the keepers planned a party and invited only a selected group of the similarly deprived.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PARTY?

This is your invitation to find out the keepers' secret. After darkness is complete (7pm) on the evening of April 28, come to the new Allied Health Building dressed for an evening of the most vile

activities. Be warned that the nature of this literature may stimulate more 'active' pleasures than reading. After the corrupt excitement of discovering the keepers' secret early in the evening, more conventional pleasures—(food and drink)—are planned to aid the participants in their return to normality.

Even those faculty who realized our real intentions showed up. In fact, so many people came that we could relax and supervise.

Actually, the "dirty books" were older journals which had been stored in the only available place—a dark, damp gymnasium basement, where the heat and humidity had fostered a lush growth of mildew. With the new library completed, we had two hundred and seventy boxes of mildewed journals to clean. The two of us dusted and vacuumed for three nights and then decided to attempt to obtain some assistance. Realizing that threats of discarding and bribery were not likely to be successful, we appealed to what we had come to recognize as a basic faculty interest and got results. After the journals were dusted, vacuumed and arranged in alphabetical order, we rewarded them with beer and pizza but truly think the inherent reward of involvement with treasures of literature should have been sufficient.

With the Dirty Books project an unqualified success, we decided to utilize a similar technique to launch our selective dissemination of information project. However, instead of entitling our project "Selective Dissemination," we chose the title "Selective Information Network." We felt that the initialism SIN would have more appeal to HAL's community than SDI.

The announcement of SIN services was made with a copy of a picture used in an ad for a dermatological product. The voluptuous blonde model wore hip-hugger harem pants, and a low-cut top with bare midriff. To this visual stimulation we added these words:

We want to get to know you
 To understand
 Your unique needs and desires
 To anticipate your needs and desires
 We want you to participate in SIN
 To learn more about SIN turn the page.

We added the last line, because we wanted to make sure everyone read the description of SIN on the second and third pages before he rushed to the library. Although we don't have anyone

on our staff who looks quite like the model in our illustration, we felt that we had better clarify our intentions as to what kind of SIN we had in mind. As it happened, someone did come in and ask to "check out a librarian."

From this response, and the deluge of completed "topics of interest" forms, we realized that the faculty had finally read one of our memorandums. We issue booklists to the faculty and send notices regarding every change in procedure which might affect service to the faculty. However, based on our previous experience, we felt that this might have been the first time nearly every faculty member had read one of our notices.

By participating in SIN, a faculty member can request that a staff member review current journals in his field for appropriate information on selected topics. He will also be notified when we receive books and audiovisual materials which are relevant to his topics. Although SIN has required many hours of staff time, the faculty members' evaluation of the information available to them through it has been gratifying.

Project Sex was an example of a rather typical academic library function—the compilation of subject bibliographies. We were asked by a committee of faculty members planning a course on human sexuality to compile a list of available resources. While we were working on the project, a local physician made a donation to the collection—200 books on sex, ranging from physiology to pornography.

In many libraries, the compiling of a bibliography and the cataloging of 200 gifts would not have been publicized. We didn't send out notices, but, since everyone on our staff has a shift at the reference desk, the materials with which we were working came to the attention of a few library regulars. They passed the word to others, and soon we considered replacing the library sign on our door with one that read "faculty lounge." Somehow, the materials we deemed storable because of their date, lack of "redeeming social value," or unscholarly approach were those of most interest. We confess to having used sexist, exploitative techniques to promote use of library services. After photocopying the picture used on the SIN announcement, we darkened the already drawn-in cleavage line; and we didn't ignore or chase away the pornography perusers.

SEX, SIN, AND DIRTY BOOKS

We believe that service is the most important function of a library and that humor and a congenial atmosphere foster communication between a library and the community it serves. Projects Sex, SIN, and Dirty Books are representative of HAL services to the faculty of the Division of Health Affairs, but similar services have been made available to students.

Rather than send announcements of services to students, we speak to every introductory class taught in the Division of Health Affairs. In these classes we give the usual information on library procedures and policies, but more importantly we stress that we are there to be of assistance.

When students enter the library, we don't wait to be asked for assistance. If they walk directly to *Index Medicus* and open it confidently, we can probably safely wait to be asked; but whenever we notice a hesitant step or a puzzled expression, we ask, "May I help you?" And even if it's the tenth time that day we've stood next to the card catalog and been asked, "Do you have a card catalog?" we make every effort to continue smiling.

We know that some students do use *Index Medicus* and other library tools confidently as a result of our teaching part of a research course. In conducting the library research units of the course, we instruct the students in the use of subject heading lists, discuss the major indexing and abstracting tools, and provide information on other types of materials, such as guides, dictionaries, and encyclopedias which may be useful to the student in his research efforts.

A further attempt to assist students in research projects, has been the compilation of research guides for selected topics. HAL research guides are patterned after the Pathfinders developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; however, we are not aware of their use in a library serving an Allied Health Community. The topics chosen are generally those on which assistance has been frequently requested and which would require the use of a variety of sources for even a very limited study.

Each research guide defines its topic, relates a source or sources for introductory material on the topic, lists subject headings which might be searched in the card catalog for books on the topic, and lists various indexing and abstracting

references which should be searched. For each indexing or abstracting tool the types of publications which are included and the subject headings which might be searched are indicated. If there are special statistical sources, dictionaries, or other tools which might be useful, they are also listed. The idea has not been to do research for the student but to guide him in the wilderness of library materials.

Occasionally even after classroom instruction, a tour of the library, and the use of a research guide, a student will have difficulty in using an indexing tool. In this case, we will assist him in locating one or more relevant citations or even accompany him into the stacks, locate a journal, and open it to the correct page. Although we won't quite read the article, we will assist by showing him how to look up words in a dictionary if necessary.

After following this procedure one HAL staff member was offered thirty dollars to write the paper, but our service policy is not quite that extensive. After locating sources and handing out a guide to writing term papers, we feel library service is about as exhaustive as possible, although we admit to proofreading in exceptional circumstances.

Sex, SIN, Dirty Books, research guides, classroom instruction, and comprehensive research assistance are not services requested by faculty or students. Rather, they are services developed by the HAL staff in anticipation of the needs of HAL users.

We believe that if any library is to be the heart of an institution it must continually develop new services and new approaches to services in light of its knowledge of the institutional community and changes within that community. Faculty and student surveys and analysis of reference questions have been useful in increasing our knowledge of the HAL community; yet we believe that creative approaches to service are developed primarily through constant daily contact with the community served. Recently someone said, "The Health Affairs Library is the *only* library I have ever used where I was asked, May I help you?" This simple phrase symbolizes an approach to library service which we believe has made the Health Affairs Library an integral part of the Division of Health Affairs.