It's Fun To Partner: Expanding Library Collaborations

Irene Munster, Eileen Harrington and Toni Negro

Introduction

"Despair shows us the limit of our imagination. Imaginations shared create collaboration, and collaboration creates community, and community inspires social change."[1] This quote from environmental author Terry Tempest Williams encapsulates many aspects of partnerships in libraries. Given the usual lack of resources, both time and money, librarians can often despair. They can become paralyzed, unable to move forward with projects to improve services or to reach out to the communities they serve in an effective manner. By partnering with others, however, these challenges might not seem so daunting, and new opportunities can arise that lead to myriad benefits.

Partnerships have a long and productive history at The Universities at Shady Grove (USG). They are a core basis for USG's existence and success, where nine University of Maryland System institutions partner to offer a selection of high-demand degree programs on one campus located in a high-density and fast-growing area of the state. Since its founding in 2000, USG has brought the best of public higher education programs from across the state and created economic opportunities for residents of Montgomery County, Maryland and the surrounding region.

The Priddy Library serves USG students, faculty and staff from all nine institutions while also seeking to expand its reach beyond its walls. One of its core goals is to build bridges with the different degree programs at USG, as well as the Montgomery County community. One approach to this has been to develop and organize cultural events highlighting social issues,

current events and student academic interests through workshops, artwork displays, exhibitions and panel discussions. For example, the Library recently partnered with the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) Criminology and Criminal Justice Program at USG and the Montgomery County Police Department to develop an exhibit, *Gang Indicia: Graffiti, Tattoos, Drawings, A Pictorial Exploration of Communication among Rival Gangs,* and presented a panel discussion by experts, *Gangs: A Regional Perspective*. In 2016, the library worked with the UMCP Public Health Sciences Program at USG, the Montgomery County Office of Disease Control and Immunization, and the Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security to develop a poster exhibit, *Fighting Zika,* and host a panel of experts to raise awareness and educate the community about the virus.

These partnerships have allowed the Library to build a richer and more sustainable relationship with both the degree programs at USG and community organizations. At the same time, developing and implementing them involved challenges. This paper will describe three collaborations the Priddy Library engaged in with partners in academia, and national and local government agencies, while highlighting the benefits, difficulties and lessons learned along the way.

Literature Review

Partnership and collaboration are words that are often used interchangeably. Wilding has defined partnership as a relationship, usually formal, between two or more partners who have a mutual interest in accomplishing something and an agreement to bear the cost of its accomplishment.[2] Pham and Tanner describe it as a process among academics and librarians who are working together to share knowledge and expertise to support teaching, learning and research experiences for the university community.[3] Coordination is the simplest approach to working together, cooperation involves more interaction among its participants and collaboration requires more interaction among equals and more sharing to create a new way of thinking.

Successful collaboration and partnerships, as described by Giesecke, entail six behaviors–shared goals, mutual respect, tolerance, trust, competencies and communication.[4]

The literature on partnerships is instructive for academic libraries and serves as a guide to approaching new relationships with faculty and campus partners. Giesecke proposes that academic libraries model organizations in times of change by working together to achieve goals, coordinating efforts, cooperating on projects and collaborating on joint ventures. She uses The Gallup (Corporation) Partnership Rating Scale, which measures common mission, purpose and goals, fairness, trust, acceptance, forgiveness, communication and unselfishness, as a framework to assess success in partnerships.[5] Todaro presents the most comprehensive guide for creating and sustaining community partnerships by succinctly outlining the range of types of collaboration that have emerged in the last five to seven years.[6] The article serves as a manual or guidebook for librarians seeking practical suggestions and answers.

Library literature devoted to collaboration reveals that much has been written about interlibrary and departmental collaborations.[7] These articles tend to focus on more traditional library functions such as information literacy instruction and shared collections. With new technologies, increased availability of and access to electronic resources and subsequent changes in information-seeking behaviors, however, the role of the librarian has changed. Along with these changes, librarians need to rethink the ways they are partnering. They need to move away from a service orientation to becoming full partners with faculty.[8] Some might also seek new types of partnerships beyond the campus, such as those described in *Libraries Beyond Their Institutions: Partnerships That Work,* which explores the variety of ways in which libraries cooperate with other types of organizations, including community organizations and government agencies.[9]

One form of collaboration undertaken by libraries are internships, mainly for LIS students. Internships have been recognized in the library literature as beneficial because they provide opportunities to learn from professionals beyond the classroom.[10] These internships are

intended to provide professional work experience, exposure to the profession and recruitment opportunities.[11] Little research has been devoted to library-based internships for non-LIS students. Harwood and McCormack describe an internship program that partnered business students with a business librarian.[12] Another example entailed having students from different disciplines work on a variety of projects with their liaison librarian.[13] This allowed the library to engage with other academic departments.

Outreach is a component of many collaborations. For the Priddy Library, outreach focuses on fostering strong relationships with the surrounding community rather than simply marketing library resources and services, in contrast to other academic libraries. Library outreach has been evident in the literature since 1958.[14] Wilding recognizes that libraries that have had a long history of collaboration and cooperation are better able to use their experience to form new partnering relationships.[15] Partnerships provide opportunities to expand resources and services to users and engage with the broader community beyond the library walls.

University of Maryland Baltimore County - Priddy Library: History Internship

For several years, the Priddy Library has sought to increase ties with the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) history program at USG beyond offering information literacy instruction to its students. A new initiative by the history program in 2014 provided an avenue to do this. UMBC began offering a new minor in public history to their undergraduate students at USG. According to a description of the program, "Public historians help create historical understanding by sharing authority and inquiry with a variety of partners, including audiences, museum professionals, preservationists."[16] In order to prepare students for future careers as public historians, the program emphasizes field experience, collaboration and succinct writing, in addition to traditional research skills.

In 2015, faculty members from the history program and the history librarian brainstormed on how best to support students in the new program.   Given the library's previous experience

with creating exhibits, the creation of a public history internship program emerged, which would focus on the development of exhibits and related programs. Interns would, it is hoped,

- gain knowledge of all the processes involved in creating an exhibit by providing administrative, event and installation support to the librarians

- gain experience in curatorial project development and research

- learn to interact with different shareholders and audiences

- become familiar with the grant application process

- investigate social media platforms and learn how their innovative features can be used to promote cultural events

- improve communication and administrative skills.

When the public history program coordinator described the internship program to their students, one showed great interest. A library coordinator with a background in graphic design and art was identified to supervise her.

Prior to creating this internship program, the library had displayed a series of exhibits on 20th-century genocides.   The same semester that the internship program launched, a class on Islam was taught in the history program at USG. An exhibit on the Bosnian genocide of the 1990s, which involved the massacre of Bosnian Muslims, presented itself as a good project for the intern, the library and the students in this class. The library offered the opportunity to other students in the class to help with developing this exhibit, and several joined the team. One commented that several job advertisements he had seen mentioned experience in exhibit development, and so he felt that helping with the Bosnian genocide exhibit would be valuable preparation for his future career.

As part of the work on this exhibit, library staff took the students to the Library of Congress to meet with an expert on Eastern European history and culture and to visit the Prints & Photographs Division to find material that could be incorporated into the exhibit. The

knowledge and enthusiasm of the Library of Congress experts had a great impact on the students. The students gained a deeper understanding of librarianship, research and subject specialization, which resulted in one student deciding to pursue a master's degree in library and information science.

The public history internship program is an example of a collaborative effort in educational outreach with UMBC's history faculty and provides greater visibility of the library in the academic community. It reminds us of the importance of cultivating relationships beyond email exchanges or meetings with faculty. In addition, this kind of internship offers undergraduates opportunities to explore a career in library and information science, gain experience in exhibit-related projects, advance their understanding of past and present issues and acquire familiarity with specialized open-source software for online exhibits. Students improve their research and writing skills while working with librarians on different tasks related to their own and the library's interests. It also provides an opportunity for the intern to build professional relationships, nurture job contacts and gain potential references. The library, with the help of this and other public history interns, created additional exhibits and undertook new initiatives that would have been harder to do on its own. These included exhibits on local gangs and the Zika virus, and exhibit-related events such as panel discussions with experts from USG and the local community.

Based on the success of the first intern, the library converted the program into a paid internship and firmly established it within the history program at USG. In addition, the library now has a model developed with one of the degree programs at USG that could be adapted and implemented with other degree programs.

National Library of Medicine – Priddy Library: Health Information Project

In 2011, USG, the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) Libraries, the University of Maryland College of Information Studies

(iSchool) and the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to support their mutual interests in medical and consumer health education, advanced training and information. As a result of this MOU, Priddy Library staff working closely with the partner institutions undertook two initiatives, which are described in the following sections.

Health Info Partners Program

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012 found that 72% of Internet users had searched online for health information within the previous year.[17] In addition, 47% of computer users at public libraries use them to find health information.[18] Increasingly, people are turning to the web to find answers to medical questions, but they are not always ensuring that the information is accurate and up-to-date. This is where librarians can help. The Health Info Partners (HIP) program was developed to provide tailored information and training to public librarians to enable them to develop and implement consumer health information programs in their institutions.

Representatives from the Priddy Library, NLM and the Southeastern/Atlantic Regional Medical Library of the National Network of Medical Libraries (NN/LM), a division of NLM that is housed in HS/HSL, came together to develop the program in early 2013. Through HIP, public librarians would have the opportunity to participate in consumer health information workshops based on content developed by NN/LM. Each workshop in this program would qualify for credit in the Medical Library Association's (MLA) Consumer Health Information Specialization Program.[19] Interested librarians could also attend other classes offered by the NN/LM, in-person or online, to work towards acquiring this MLA certification. The Southeastern/Atlantic Regional Medical Library offered to cover the cost of certification in this specialization for up to 50 public librarians from the state of Maryland. Priddy Library staff would provide continuing support for

the trainees as they worked on creating consumer health programs and access to information for their users.

Originally, the hope was to have an in-person workshop at USG to kick-off the program. Outreach to library directors from across the state was conducted to promote the event. Finding participants, though, became a challenge for a variety of reasons. Some librarians did not have the time or financial resources to be able to travel to a workshop in another city. Others had already received training on the topic and did not see it as a priority at this time. In other cases, librarians felt that they did not have the support of their supervisors to participate. Given these challenges the decision was made to take a different approach.

Based on relationships between the director of the Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) and USG, Priddy Library staff met with her to discuss the possibility of doing workshops for MCPL staff. She was enthusiastic about the idea, and fortuitously her staff had already been planning a professional development event for adult services librarians on the Affordable Care Act, which was just rolling out. It was decided to combine that presentation with one of the workshops on consumer health information and libraries given by the USG health and life sciences librarian in November 2013.

Subsequently, through our previous attempts at reaching out to library directors across Maryland, we connected with staff from the Maryland State Library Resources Center (SLRC) who were planning their annual conference, which attracts more than 100 library staff from across the state. They invited the health and life sciences librarian to present two workshops at the conference in March 2014. One workshop explored the important role libraries and librarians can play in promoting health literacy and examined some of the plethora of online health-related websites that can be used with patrons. It also included tips on conducting a health-related reference interview. The second workshop focused on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), including its history and impact on medical practice. It considered how CAM is used, how to avoid "bad science" when searching for information on different CAM treatments and

how to look up evidence of the effectiveness of CAM therapies. In the workshop evaluations, several attendees mentioned that these sessions were highlights of the conference for them and that they came away with new knowledge about how consumer health information can be incorporated into public libraries.

Even though challenges were faced in moving this project forward, several benefits emerged from this collaboration. It strengthened the Priddy Library's connections with public libraries, particularly MCPL. Several public librarians who attended the workshops mentioned that they had not realized that members of the public could access databases and other resources at the Priddy Library if they needed more in-depth or technical health information. Librarians now had another avenue for robust referrals. Even though the project did not proceed exactly as envisioned, it did reach those librarians who had an interest in learning more about searching for and accessing consumer health information and implementing health-related programming in their libraries.

Virtual Internships at NLM

In fall 2013, the Priddy Library, NLM and the iSchool at UMCP launched a virtual internship program at NLM, the world's largest biomedical library. The main goals of the program were to:

- foster the development of future health information professionals
- provide students with real-world experiences in the field of health librarianship, consumer health and health informatics
- develop leadership and project management skills in students

The semester-long internships were open to all USG students in any degree program and students in the iSchool at UMCP. The projects that interns worked on spanned NLM's

research and development initiatives, social media outreach and historical collections. The internships were unpaid, but students could earn credit. To date nine students have completed the program.

Building on the idea suggested by the NLM associate fellowship coordinator, it was decided to offer virtual rather than in-person internships for various reasons. Many USG and iSchool students are juggling families, jobs and classes, so a virtual internship fits well in their hectic schedules. In addition, the number of people telecommuting and/or with a completely virtual job has increased in recent years.[20] Virtual internships provide students with the opportunity to develop skills necessary to working in a virtual environment. With our increasingly networked world and the preponderance of new collaborative technologies, virtual internships have become a feasible alternative to traditional internships.

A committee of representatives from the iSchool, the Priddy Library and NLM developed the application process and materials for the program. Members of the committee talked with program directors and internship coordinators for several of the degree programs at USG when developing the guidelines for applying and to gauge the interest of their students in this program. iSchool students seemed to be obvious candidates, but interest could also exist among public health sciences, biology and social work students. The coordinator at NLM worked with NLM staff to develop several internships each semester. The coordinator from the Priddy Library advertised the positions, screened applications and matched applicants to the positions. The Priddy Library and NLM coordinators also acted as a resource to both the students and the NLM supervisors throughout the semester to address any issues, such as problems with communication between the supervisor and intern or managing expectations.

The program represents a unique way for academic librarians to support teaching and learning. Often librarians follow more traditional routes of information literacy, such as in-class sessions, drop-in workshops, embedded librarianship or developing class assignments with faculty members. This program takes things a step further, providing students with a way to

implement some of the theories they are learning about in their classes in real-world situations and to develop their soft-skills in areas such as project management, team work and communication.

The internships also filled a gap in learning for the students. The iSchool has offered classes on health information and medical librarianship in the past, but not necessarily every semester. These internships provided an opportunity for students to learn more about health librarianship, and, hopefully, increase the number of experienced and qualified candidates entering the field as professionals. Four interns actually went on to become associate fellows at NLM after graduation. In addition, several interns worked on projects that have a national and international reach since people from all over the world access NLM's consumer health information resources.

Despite such successes, the project encountered a number of challenges. The first semester of the program coincided with a federal government shut-down lasting more than two weeks, during which NLM staff were not permitted to work. The students and NLM staff were flexible, enabling the students to continue working on their projects even when NLM staff could not. The students then reconnected with NLM staff once the shutdown ended and were still able to complete their projects by the end of the semester. Some semesters we faced difficulties in finding student to fill the available positions, partly because of insufficient marketing and outreach due to time constraints and other commitments.   At the same time in some semesters there was a lack of suitable projects for interns at NLM.   Moreover, the majority of the students who participated as interns came from the College Park campus of the iSchool, which already has a system for matching up students and organizations, including NLM, for internships.

Given these circumstances, and with other projects emerging at the Priddy Library and NLM, both parties came to recognize that it was time to end this program and focus on other avenues for training future professionals. As several researchers have shown, it is important to accept when a project has run its course and when the resources devoted to it could be applied

more effectively elsewhere.[21] This does not discount the successes achieved, and often when one door closes, another opens.

Gaithersburg Book Festival – Priddy Library: Multilingual Story Time

The first Gaithersburg Book Festival (GBF) occurred in 2010 after the mayor of Gaithersburg, MD, attended the U.S. National Book Festival and heard Dr. James Billington, Librarian of Congress, speak about waning support for the National Book Festival and the need to encourage similar events elsewhere. The GBF features writers, including Pulitzer Prize winners, National Book Award winners, Newbery Medal winners, and best-selling authors.[22]

As a way of expanding awareness about USG and to provide students with different venues to give back to the community, the library in partnership with USG's Office of Development and Community Partnerships explored the possibility of participating in the GBF. With this in mind, representatives from USG and the planning committee for the GBF held a meeting in February 2015. USG was interested in promoting opportunities for Montgomery County citizens to enroll in its programs, as well as proposing innovative ideas to connect with the public attending the festival; the GBF planning committee was interested in adding one more partner to the event.

This first meeting allowed both parties to learn about mutual visions and strengths and about how each interacts with the local community. It gave the library the opportunity to share ideas on how the GBF and USG could cooperate and collaborate to achieve common goals. One central part of the GBF is the "Children's Village," where children interact with authors and enjoy arts and crafts activities, writing workshops, story contests and musical performances. Its focus is to stimulate children's interest in reading and writing. The library thought this would be a prime place for USG to get involved. Inspired by the diversity of students' backgrounds on campus, USG proposed reading children's books in some of the many different languages spoken in the community. This diversity had not been well represented at the festival in the past.

The GBF organizers were impressed by the proposal since it presented such a good opportunity to incorporate more diversity into festival programming. USG also proposed to have a booth where festival attendees could learn about USG academic programs and activities. Both parties agreed to these proposals and formalized the partnership by having USG sign an agreement making it a sponsor of the event.

For help in understanding the potential audience for its readings, USG turned to the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), with whom the Priddy Library has a long-term relationship. MCPS translates the information it provides residents into the six different languages most commonly spoken in Montgomery County homes: Spanish, Amharic, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and French. In addition, the GBF organizers recommended, based on past attendance to the GBF, that the readings should be directed to children between five and ten years old.

The next task entailed finding partners within USG who would like to collaborate on the project. The library reached out to the obvious partners, including the education programs offered by Bowie University, Towson University and the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) and the iSchool from UMCP. Representatives from these programs agreed that participation would lead to greater exposure for them in the broader community and provide a way for students to give back to the local community.

Flyers were distributed around the USG campus seeking student volunteers to read children's books in their native languages. The multilingual story time would be concurrent with the story time hosted by MCPS school librarians, though in a different location. The MCPS librarians would read in English; the USG students would read in other languages.

The first year, the USG Office of Development and Community Partnerships and the librarians had to determine the best way the promotional booth could benefit the institution. The director of the office was one of those who staffed the booth on the day of the festival, and his ability to reach out to attendees reinforced the effectiveness of person-to-person contact. A

student ambassador from the Office of Student Services at USG also assisted at the booth, giving her an opportunity to learn and develop promotional skills. Brochures and many giveaways attracted festival participants to the booth. The location of the informational booth opposite the Multilingual Story Time venue served as an effective way to encourage people to stop and participate in the readings.

In 2015, stories were read in Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Farsi, Hindi and Korean, and in 2016, in Spanish, Amharic, French, Korean, Russian and Arabic. Students from different majors volunteered for the event, including nursing, psychology, history, education and library science. The student volunteers who read in their native languages had an opportunity to interact more deeply with parents and children with similar backgrounds. Members of the community applauded the volunteers when they learned that the students had just finished their final exams. Participation improved the students' communication and leadership skills since they were responsible for scheduling their time slot, selecting their book and presenting it in an engaging manner. Perhaps the most important outcome for the library was that it has generated a different type of connection with USG students, in addition to a richer involvement by the students with USG.

The library celebrated the success of the event with the student readers and thanked them for their contribution and dedication in sharing their culture with the community. Mostly, this opportunity enriched the lives of all those who participated - the volunteers, USG staff and the GBF participants. As one of our student volunteers wrote to us: "I really enjoyed that day being involved in a very creative activity." The development of this new partnership both with other campus entities and with GBF provided the library with an opportunity to expand and reach out to underserved members in the community by highlighting their culture and heritage.

Conclusion

The three partnerships described in this paper represent new ways to look at collaborations in academic libraries. The program with the history department at UMBC goes beyond traditional information literacy-based collaborations, providing deeper engagement with the students and helping them to develop 21st- century skills. Often academic libraries focus on campus-centric partnerships. The virtual internship project with NLM provided an opportunity to work with a federal agency for the benefit not only of students, but also public librarians and their patrons. Finally, the Gaithersburg Book Festival program showcases an innovative approach to community outreach by an academic library.

Through these collaborations the Priddy Library has reaped several benefits. They have strengthened ties to academic departments and allowed students and the broader community to experience the library in new and different ways. The library accomplished tasks that would have been difficult to achieve while working independently, such as a subsequent project from the UMBC internship program that involved learning and utilizing Omeka, an online software, to create a history of the Priddy Library in an innovative way. Through coordinating the NLM internship project, the health & life sciences librarian strengthened relationships with librarians at NLM and gained a deeper understanding of the resources and workings of that organization. In addition, the GBF partnership led to an expansion of the library's juvenile book collection to include books on diversity and the immigrant experience in the U.S.

The approaches taken by the Priddy Library at USG could be adapted at other academic libraries across the country. Building on successes and learning from challenges, academic libraries should pursue new ways of partnering. They should continually analyze the effectiveness and productiveness of their current partnerships, determine if worth pursuing, and understand when the investment of time, personnel and other resources is no longer producing the desired results and should be ended. Overall, the myriad benefits of partnerships outweigh any drawbacks.

Irene Munster (imunster@umd.edu) is Library Director, Priddy Library, Universities at Shady Grove

Elieen Harrignton (eharring@umd.edu) is Health and Life Sciences Librarian, Priddy Library, Universities at Shady Grove

Toni Negro (anegro@umd.edu) is Business and Education Librarian, Priddy Library, Universities at Shady Grove

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