Starting from Square One: Library Communications from the Ground Up

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Background: How Our Department Became a Department

Often referred to as the heart of the university, the library is a place for students to gather, study, work, find help, and make the most of their college experience. Sometimes called "the third place," it is a destination for collaboration, relaxation, employment, research, and community. It is a place that students can rely on.

A university library holds thousands of stories within its doors: stories about successes, challenges, opportunities, discoveries, and the people who work through them. At the University of Oregon Libraries, our Communications and Marketing Department strives to tell some of these stories. We use several different media and many diverse strategies to do so. Our goal is to support the work of our outstanding librarians and library staff, and to create the best learning environment for student success. Through our storytelling, we advance the library's mission.

Of course, many of the great stories to be found within our libraries are nothing new. Libraries have been helping students, teachers, and researchers for centuries. What is new—not only here at the UO Libraries, but also at many of our peer institutions—is a shift in consciousness with regards to our storytelling. In an era when the media and telecommunications landscape is continuously in flux, and the missions of our libraries are likewise evolving, library leaders are more aware than ever of the need for skilled and coordinated efforts in organizational communications and outreach. At the UO, this awareness recently lead to an important "first": we started a new department dedicated to library communications.

Our department was launched two years ago. It developed out of need. During organization-wide listening sessions in the summer of 2013, better-integrated marketing and communications support was named by multiple library departments as a "wish list" opportunity. At the same time, the library staff members in the various communications roles

The UO Libraries Communications & Marketing team visits the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology (OIMB), summer 2015. L–R: Exhibits Designer Cristian Boboia, OIMB Librarian Barbara Butler, Jason Stone, Mandi Garcia, Student Photographer Emily Albertson, Lesli Larson, Student Videographer Joe Hughes.

found themselves scattered among different offices and departments in the library, and they often felt isolated and overwhelmed by the amount of work on their plates.

Well, if you've worked in libraries for any amount of time, you can probably guess where this is going: a marketing committee was formed. The committee's charge was to help streamline the process for planning and promoting events, exhibits, and library news. However, committee members quickly realized that demand for communications support far outweighed the present capacity to provide it. Requests were coming from various departments, from all eight of our branch libraries. After surveying stakeholders and doing the necessary research, the committee proposed creating a new communications and marketing department. The goal was to increase awareness of library services, collections, and facilities with targeted outreach to university undergraduates. The plan was to achieve greater efficiencies, creative synergies, and outcomes by freeing library communications staff to concentrate on communications and coordinating their efforts under a communications director.

It was an idea whose time had come. Many of the key skills and experience sets we needed were already represented by existing library personnel. UO Libraries therefore was able to form the new department largely through staff shuffling, without adding very much FTE to our overall workforce. (In the present climate of tightening higher education budgets, this was more than convenient—it was nearly imperative.)

The UO Libraries Communications and Marketing Department was officially founded in 2014, centralizing the library's personnel and resources in the areas of graphic design, copywriting and editing, website content management, social media outreach, exhibit services, and strategic communications. The department was set up with 3.75 FTE. Our permanent staff

includes the director, a writer/editor, a graphic designer/photographer, and an exhibits designer. In addition, all our efforts are supported by the work of our amazing student employees.

In the past two years, Communications and Marketing has significantly built out the UO Libraries' social media presence, revamped and expanded the library's development publication, *Building Knowledge*, launched an in-house video project to promote library student employment, and produced numerous print collateral campaigns in support of library exhibits, events, resources, and programs. In addition, the department has partnered with the library's web development group and the User Experience unit to redesign the library's homepage and update wayfinding and directional signage throughout the main library.

The establishment of our department has enriched and expanded the library's communication efforts. We advance the educational mission of UO Libraries and its relationship with the academic community through the development of original editorial and marketing collateral, exhibits, special events, audio-video content, and social media outreach. Additionally, we ensure that library communications follow UO brand standards and align with campus-level communications efforts.

Lesli Larson, Director of Communications
UO Libraries Social Media Strategies

A strategic area of growth for the department was the creation of a dedicated social media program. With the help of a series of astute, student social media coordinators, the library joined Instagram and YouTube (we'll soon be joining Snapchat as well) while updating our presence on Facebook and Twitter with a more youthful tone and voice. Our goal is to create a distinct and consistent social media voice and identity for UO Libraries that increases levels of interaction with followers and generates a greater awareness of our collections, events, and services.

Calibrating our content for an undergraduate audience, we launched a series of library campaigns highlighting high-value resources like our extended building hours, Bookeye document scanners, 3-D printer, study spaces, phone charging stations, loaner GoPro cameras, and chat reference services. In surveys of senior class members, all these had been identified as resources that they wish they had known about before they graduated.

By far, Instagram has been our most successful social media channel for student engagement. All posts make use of multimedia content to increase visual interest and highlight the photographic, videographic, and design talents of our creative student team. Ongoing campaigns include:

This cover of the UO Libraries donor publication features Merry Prankster Ken Babbs, basketball hall-of-famer Bill Walton, and Student Social Media Coordinator Leah Braunstein.

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- #wayfinderwednesday (using POV video to guide students from the front of the library to a specific resource or collection)
- #allknightatknight (24-5 building hours)
- #myuolibjob (highlighting student employment opportunities in the library)
- #techtuesday (showcasing technology resources)

In the past year, we have developed three specific campaigns to cross-promote library resources, promote the library as a study space, and demystify service desks.

For finals week, our Social Media Coordinator put together a series of "kits" for students that group library resources around themes like productivity, group study, or napping. Each kit shows a collection of items which reference a range of finals-related support services and resources in an informal and lighthearted way.
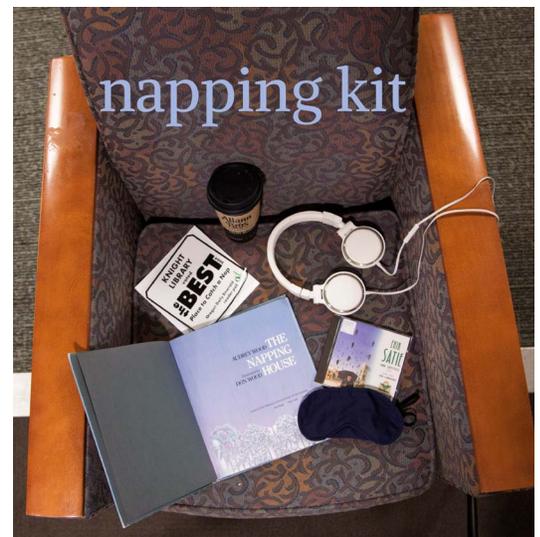
In our "#uostudyspot" campaign, we posted photos of library study spots in both obvious and out-of-the-way places in our main and branch libraries. On Instagram, we craft our campaign hashtags to be short and catchy, and encourage students to pick up and repurpose them. For the #uostudyspot campaign, a number of students posted their own photos using the hashtag which in turn provided us with info on how (and when) students study and which library spaces they prefer (quiet or collaborative, large open spaces or out-of-the-way cubicles). Further, by choosing a hashtag that had less of a library focus, we encourage other campus departments (and non-library users) to join the campaign. Our aim is to promote the library as part of the larger campus ecology.
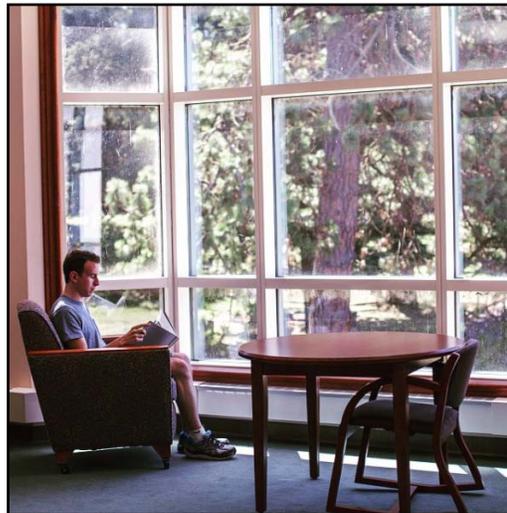
Finally, for our third campaign, we put together a portrait series that helped put a friendly face to the many service desks in the library. Our graphics student designed a Polaroid-inspired framing device to give staff and student profile photos (shot on a DSLR) a softened, informal feel. Each week, we posted a new profile photo with additional information about the staff member–and service desk–included in the text field. The promo featured staff from multiple service desks (main, computer help, music, Architecture and Allied Arts Library) highlighting the diversity of people and services offered by the library.

#UOLibStaff   #helpUOut

Jonathan Cain
Government Document Librarian
Knight Library Research/Information Desk

#helpUOut

Elizabeth Peterson
Reference & Research Services
Knight Library - 1st Floor
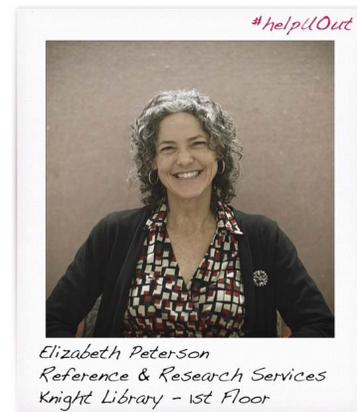
Adding a student-directed voice to our social media program helped calibrate the tone of our messaging making it more succinct, youthful and conversational while helping us to create compelling, media-rich visual campaigns that resonate with undergraduate library users.


Student Social Media Coordinator Michaela Giunchigliani frames a shot for a promotional video.

Mandi Garcia, Senior Graphic Designer
Hiring Talented Student Employees and the Digital Display System

Most of our student workforce are undergraduates; the number we employ varies from term to term, depending on funding and the sorts of projects we have in progress. We look for extraordinarily talented and motivated students—and so far, we have certainly found them! They offer interesting insights into the campus scene, and always bring creative ideas to the table. Working with our students is one of the best parts of the department. They are our inspiration.

For many student employees, this is their first job. So we look at their portfolios and conduct an interview with multiple staff members from our department. We want students who are eager to learn, taking advantage of their employment to build a strong foundation, learning the fundamentals of real-world work and taking the initiative to develop projects from start to finish. While the department typically has a single student assigned to a specific area of work, we try to capitalize on the collective skill sets of our creative student team.
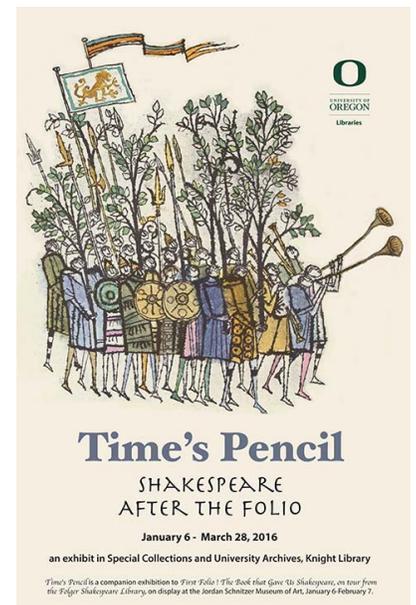
Poster designed by Cristian Boboia to promote a recent exhibit in UO Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

We have hired student assistants in many areas, including graphic design, videography, social media content management, photography, writing, and wayfinding. When creating the department, we envisioned a hive of activity. We encourage collaboration among our students and ourselves.

I am the graphic designer/photographer and exhibit coordinator. I create graphics for everything from web and signage icons, to event posters and programs, to digital display slides. In addition, my student assistant and I photograph exhibits, certain items from Special Collections and University Archives, library events, and staff portraits. We get many requests for photography and graphics, and try to use as much original work as possible. In addition to the shots we take for specific projects, we also maintain an original stock photography collection. Our graphic design and photography students are able to support the work of our other student employees, providing them with the visuals they need for their projects. While employed by the library, they learn design standards, printing processes, naming conventions, and formatting.

We also create content for display on our digital signage system. When we started our department two years ago, we adopted a digital display system called Four Winds Interactive in order to enhance library learning spaces. Multiple schools and units across the UO campus use this system, making it possible to share resources with one another. Using Four Winds, we are able to schedule multiple display locations and create specialized rotations. We create "slides"—usually an image or short movie—and decide which display they will play on and for how long. We keep these displays up to date, showcasing recent news, events, exhibits, resources, services, collections, and other information we would like our users to know. In addition, we use these display screens to showcase video or other imagery that may accompany physical exhibits or events. Including basic design, we spend approximately .3 FTE managing the content for the system.

Digital display slides—such as this one created by Student Design Assistant Jue Wang—promote events in the UO Libraries.

Jason Stone, Writing Specialist
Creating Style Guides for Library Communications

Years ago, when I was working in the greeting card industry, we had a saying: *Give somebody a fish and they will eat for a day. But teach them to fish and they'll spend the whole day telling you outrageous lies.*

This aphorism never quite dampened my zeal for promoting the DIY approach.

In getting our communications shop up and running in the UO Libraries, a big challenge we have faced is one of supply and demand. Simply put, there is more demand for our services than we can realistically provide, given our current staffing levels. It is unlikely that we will be adding significant FTE anytime soon. Therefore, we look for opportunities to help our library colleagues help themselves to be better communicators. By providing the right resources and training, we can empower the library staff to perform basic communications tasks with a higher degree of accuracy, efficacy, and confidence—and thereby free up more of our department's time for higher-level projects. It's a win for everyone.

One important tool for "teaching people to fish" is the style guide. A style guide, according to Wikipedia, "is a set of standards for the writing and design of documents."

Since 1993 the UO has published a style guide targeted to the entire campus community, *How We Tell Our Story: Communications Standards for the University of Oregon* (https://brand.uoregon.edu/editorial-style-guide). It contains a wealth of information for those of us who are communications specialists. As an editor, I consult it regularly and I've memorized whole sections. But for most employees, I'm afraid it may represent too much of a deep dive: running to 150+ pages, the guide covers topics ranging from brand positioning to mailing specifications to proofreading marks. The picture only gets murkier when we take the experiences of our student staff into account. Journalism majors are used to working with the Associated Press (AP) style guide; students in the humanities and social sciences are most familiar with MLA style.

To help get everyone on the same page, we have developed a concise, one-stop style guide specifically for library communications. Ours is only a few pages long. It doesn't address everything—you'll still need to go to *How We Tell Our Story* (http://tinyurl.com/z9whemj) if you want information about UO athletics identity, Latin honors, en- versus em-dash usage, or the paper recycling policy—but our guide does offer a quick-start overview that can help library staffers get answers to their FAQs and avoid the most common mistakes. What's more, it offers guidance in cases that are library specific. *Should I capitalize "e-reserves" if it's the first word in a sentence? Is it too informal to say "stacks"? Is it overly formal to say "monographs"? Is it okay to refer to every library staffer as a "librarian"?* These are the types of questions that our guide addresses.

Our style sheet also offers quick reference resources for design and layout (color swatches, fonts, headers, logo usage), image selection and sourcing (stock photography, copyrights, image ratios and resolutions, model release form), accessibility considerations, and creating library research guides.

Conclusion

It's been a whirlwind of activity getting our library communications department up and running over the past two years! And judging from our conversations at the Amigos Library Services First Annual Library Marketing and Communications Conference last November,

we are not alone—the majority of attendees we spoke with came from libraries that have only recently added staff and resources in this vital area.

In the year to come, we are already looking ahead to a number of next steps and upcoming projects. We will be digging deeper into website and social media analytics, developing an e-newsletter to promote library services and resources to our teaching faculty, transitioning to in-house design and layout of our *Building Knowledge* donor publication, and further exploring the intersection of library user experience and communications out-reach. In addition, we will be negotiating an evolving landscape in university communica-tions. The trends on our campus are towards centralization, and we will be looking for ways to capitalize on opportunities for collaboration, networking, and resource sharing—without sacrificing the special advantages that accrue from our status as a department embedded within the academic unit we serve.

These are indeed exciting times to be working in library communications! 🏃

Creative shot from our summer 2015 #bookface social media campaign.

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