Dancing, Dogs and DISCO Balls:
Sustaining a Happy Library Outreach Community

Kathy Anders, Stephanie Graves, and Beth German, Texas A&M Libraries

Start

In addition to drawing in new user populations, library outreach activities can function as exercises in mindful team building and community development within the library organization. We, member of the Learning and Outreach unit at Texas A&M University Libraries, illustrate how we developed programmatic outreach activities centered upon a unified theme, "happy starts at the library." We used outreach events and projects to contribute to our in-house community building. Our activities including the making of an orientation Youtube video, participating in student orientation camps, and hosting a 3,600+ attendee open house event, among other things. These outreach elements were not only external programming aimed at students and faculty, but they offered an opportunity to grow an internal community of outreach stakeholders within a large university library system with five locations. Event statistics show library users responded positively to the "happy" theme, with record attendance at events. Internal assessment data also indicates library stakeholders now feel a deeper connection to library outreach programming and have a strong desire to continue participating in future events.

We used two key processes to build an internal outreach community:
- creating affective impact
- and cultivating a participatory culture

Through our carefully selected, unified theme "happy," we created excitement about the libraries. Focusing on how the libraries make users happy generated internal pride, which in turn boosted excitement about outreach events. Additionally, because the theme advertised a general affective emotion, libraries with different disciplinary and service focuses were equally able to engage in themed outreach events.

Video Viewing Party

Before releasing the library "Happy" video on our YouTube channel and social media outlets, librarians and staff were treated to a video viewing party.

Participatory Culture
- Everyone in the library was invited to the party, including the student dancers.
- Staff members had the chance to have their picture taken with Library Rev.
- Food was provided to make the party festive.

Affect
- Happy t-shirts were handed out to all library staff and student workers, demonstrating appreciation and inclusion.
- This party was a chance to have a pleasant get-together and provided a nice break from meetings.

Library Reveille

Library Reveille receives her name from the school's mascot, Reveille, a collie that lives on campus and attends important events and sport games. Library Rev is a 4'6" stuffed replica that travels around the libraries. She is much loved, and is often petted and photographed by students.

Participatory Culture
- Library units choose what events they'd like Library Rev to attend.
- Library staff can dress her for events or holidays.

Affect
- Library Rev is a playful way to show that the University Libraries embrace Texas A&M University traditions.
- She has already become a beloved participant in library photo shoots with librarians and staff.

Fish Camp

Teams of librarians made presentations at Texas A&M University's 4-day freshman orientation camps, which happen in nine sessions over the course of the summer. We showed the video and answered questions during energetic Q&A sessions with large groups of freshmen.

Participatory Culture
- Librarians from across multiple libraries made presentations to student groups.
- There was plenty of time for bonding during the 90 min. car rides there and back!

Affect
- Students at Fish Camp are very energetic, so librarians felt excited to work with such enthusiastic crowds.
- By inviting all librarians to join members of the Learning and Outreach unit, we made sure that everyone felt included.

Carnival Games

Libraries Open House had an active learning component, with students participating in at least 3 library-themed carnival games. The games allowed librarians and staff to teach students about library services in a fun and engaging way.

Participatory Culture
- Library units were allowed to create their own carnival games related to their services.
- A team leader was selected from each unit to coordinate unit participation, solicit unit volunteers, and act as the point person during the event.

Affect
- A team comprised of unit-based leadership helped create a sense of ownership from the various participating units.
- Staff that typically do not interact with students were able to speak directly with students, giving them a concrete connection to their users.
- Creative library carnival games invigorate librarians and staff.

"Happy" Video

The Libraries, together with three student dance troupes, created a "Happy" video of the Libraries, set to Pharrell Williams' song "Happy." Through continuous movement and dance, the video highlights services in each of six library buildings while presenting the broad range of spaces that the Libraries have to offer. The end result is 4 minute 43 second video that has been viewed over 68,000 times and has received national recognition.

Participatory Culture
- Each library and service area was able to highlight features that were important to them.
- The video featured librarians and library staff in addition to student dancers.
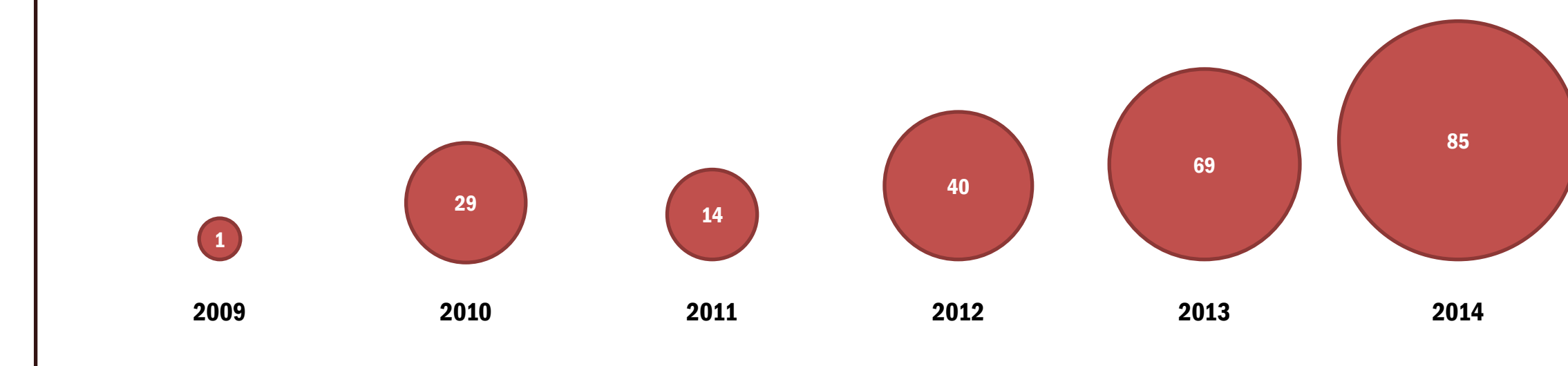
Affect
- Library staff were excited to participate in the final scene of the video.
- Librarians and staff felt included in the library culture.
- People were happy to see themselves and their colleagues in the video.

End

Assessment

Strategies
1. Attendance and volunteer statistics
2. Post Event Plus/Delta Analysis
3. Feedback Surveys
4. Stakeholder Meetings

Growth of Open House Volunteers

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	29	14	40	69	85

"Happy" Video Faculty and Staff Feedback Analysis

An anonymous survey of library faculty and staff was sent after viewing the Happy video. Thirty two comments were received. Comments were coded for affective language, both positive and negative. The chart shows the portion of positive to negative affective words. The corresponding Wordle illustrates frequency of term.

14% Neg. 86% Positive
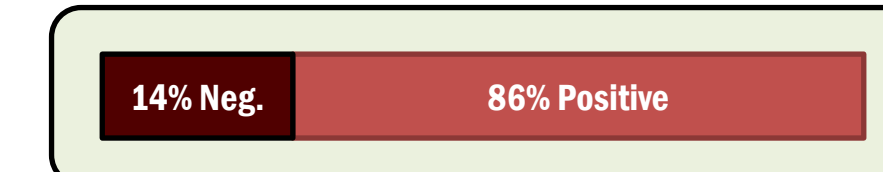
Conclusion

Our program demonstrates how outreach programming can be internally community-building by incorporating affective motivation and participatory culture into outreach events. Other libraries considering this approach should keep in mind the following principles:

- Traditional service-based orientation outreach may marginalize some library units. Focusing on how you want your users to "feel" about the libraries allows all library staff to participate in outreach.

- External affective marketing can bring about positive changes in library culture.

- Rewarding library staff for their contributions to outreach efforts is essential to maintaining a participatory culture.

- Allowing library units to have some agency over their contributions builds buy-in.

- Building a participatory culture through collaboration takes additional time and management. This is a high cost, high reward endeavor.

- Assessment is key to continued involvement.