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Posters, Programs, and Perspectives on Democracy

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Environments for Student Growth and Development: Libraries and Student Affairs in Collaboration

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Kahl and Paterson provide an example of collaboration around a specific, one-time program that both units were interested in bringing to their university, in this case an art installation on the theme of democracy. Although the authors spearheaded the program, they tapped the expertise of colleagues in their units and across campus in order to accomplish their goals. Kahl and Paterson's work also serves as an example of combining active programming, in this case three lectures by campus faculty, with passive programming, an approach where professionals create exhibits or educational displays in a centrally located venue for students and others to browse and absorb at their convenience.

Milner Library and Student Affairs collaborated at Illinois State University to offer passive programming, in the form of the exhibit Thoughts on Democracy: Reinterpreting Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms Posters. The exhibit, originally curated by Florida International University's Wolfsonian museum, ran from February 1 to May 7, 2010, and displayed graphic works expressing ideals at the core of American democracy by sixty contemporary artists. A related lecture series and exhibit website were also created.

In this chapter, the authors use Dr. Dick Raspa and Dane Ward's “Five Ps of Collaboration”—passion, playfulness, project, persistence, and promotion—to examine what proved to be a truly collaborative relationship.

The collaboration worked well because the librarian and student affairs official took advantage of complementary skills, joint interest in offering co-curricular resources by nonacademic units, and shared desire to support the campus's American Democracy Project (ADP) that promotes civic engagement.
OVERVIEW OF THE COLLABORATION

In FY2010, Milner Library and Student Affairs collaborated as part of Illinois State University's American Democracy Project (ADP). ADP is a cooperative campus effort with a goal of promoting civic engagement—one of five core values of the university's strategic plan, Educating Illinois.2

The collaboration was the exhibit Thoughts on Democracy: Reinterpreting Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms Posters, located on the library's main floor. The exhibit, originally curated by Florida International University's Wolfsonian museum, displayed graphic works expressing ideals at the core of American democracy by sixty contemporary artists. A related lecture series by three resident faculty attracted over 220 people and was rated excellent in forty-seven of fifty-six evaluations. An exhibit website provided information on the artists, access to podcasts of the three lectures, and additional online resources.

This partnership between student affairs and the library is an example of passive programming. In this case, the developmental concept of student/environment interaction was bringing an art exhibit into a student study space where it was not expected. The lecture series, opening reception, and inclusion of the exhibit in coursework helped students make meaning of the art.

A working relationship had developed between the exhibit co-coordinators—the Dean of Students, Ian Paterson, and a social sciences subject librarian, Chad Kahl—due to their interaction in ADP. There was also joint interest in offering cocurricular resources by nonacademic units. It worked well because it merged the skills of the librarian—institutional experience with exhibits and academic lectures and disciplinary focus—and the student affairs official—experience with programming for students, contracting, and vendor relations. Both participants also had access to grant funding opportunities that were successfully utilized.

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

In 1857, Illinois State Normal University was founded as the first public institution of higher education in the state. Established as a teacher education institution, Illinois State has developed into a multipurpose, comprehensive university with degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels.

The university is one of twelve public universities in Illinois. Its academic departments offer more than two hundred major/minor options in the colleges of Applied Science and Technology, Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, and Fine Arts, and the Mennonite College of Nursing. The Graduate School coordinates forty-nine master's, specialist, and doctoral programs. Most of Illinois State's 1,136 faculty members hold the highest degrees in their fields. The university enrolls students from throughout Illinois, forty other states, the District of Columbia, and over sixty other countries. Students are mentored by a faculty that includes numerous teacher-scholars recognized at national and international levels, and all are dedicated to superior teaching.

The fall 2011 enrollment was 20,762 of which 18,254 were undergraduates. Students from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education account for thirteen percent of all students.

Milner Library's mission is to serve university constituents, including the citizens of Illinois. Milner is a member of the Alliance Library System and the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries of Illinois. Milner has a staff of eighty-five, materials budget of $3.6 million, and a collection of more than 1.6 million volumes, fifty-four thousand electronic journals, and thirty-two thousand multimedia items. The library instruction and information literacy program offered over seven hundred instructional sessions in the past academic school year, and the library assisted patrons with over twenty-seven thousand reference transactions in the 2010–2011 academic year.

The mission of the Division of Student Affairs at Illinois State University is to influence the campus culture to achieve student engagement, inclusion and pride in the University. To realize that vision, the division serves as an umbrella organization for twelve departments that offer services, programs, and facilities to augment the formal education of students and promote their growth as citizens and leaders.

PASSIVE PROGRAMMING

Passive programming is planned programming that does not necessarily require a specific meeting time. Instead, this type of programming has the ability to reach people over a longer period of time as well as reaching those students who, on their own, might not choose to attend a program being offered. Passive programs convey information in a manner in which active participation is unnecessary and is often done in the form of displays. Placing the exhibit where students already congregate takes advantage of existing traffic patterns, thus reducing the need to direct people to the display. "A good passive program will attract patrons to the activity and, while
it may require planning, does not require a huge amount of staff time day to day. Passive programming can give visitors something to do without dedicated staff time, and therefore can be very cost-effective. If what is provided is educational, most students will instinctively learn something and this approach has the ability to reach a different audience than formal programs.

These programs have the potential to be more effective than active programs by allowing greater amounts of information to be presented because students are able to absorb the information at their own pace. Passive programming—visual or auditory—provides information and keeps the environment interesting.

THE EXHIBIT

The exhibit contained over eighty graphic works created by contemporary artists and designers that responded to the invitation of Florida International University's design museum, the Wolfsonian, to express ideals at the core of American democracy. Each artist was asked to consider Norman Rockwell's visually moving paintings that conveyed the meaning of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech to Congress and the American people—Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. The paintings originally appeared in four consecutive issues of the Saturday Evening Post in 1943.

Images were reproduced as two-by-three-foot posters and displayed for twelve weeks on the main entry floor of Milner Library during the spring academic semester of 2010. The main floor of the library consists of the circulation desk, reference desk, reference collection, current periodicals, computer lab, new books, browsing collection of best sellers, microfiche and microfilm readers, computer workstations, and a considerable amount of open study space.

The culture allows for conversation on this floor. The images were hung on the walls of two adjacent but separate spaces. A display case with original copies of the Saturday Evening Post and two large posters describing the exhibit were placed at the entrance to one of the spaces. Although the opening reception allowed for the display of all eighty-three pieces, the ongoing display allowed for only a third of the collection at a time. The artwork was rotated three times throughout the semester.

From the outset, the Thoughts on Democracy program was an art exhibit. It was determined that displaying the works in the main floor study area of the campus library had multiple benefits. First, the hanging equipment was already in place, which would reduce additional costs. The library was open for more hours than any other building on campus. The area was monitored whenever the building was open by existing library staff. It was space that all patrons to the library, at a minimum, passed through when utilizing the building. The traditional use of the space was as a study lounge with movable furniture and tables. These furnishings can be easily reconfigured to support the use of the space at any given time. The use of the space allows for high turnover between classes, guaranteeing an ever-evolving audience for the display, and served as excellent space for the passive programming aspect of the program.

THE LECTURES

A lecture series was developed to accompany the art exhibit. The three speakers were carefully chosen to examine three different aspects: an exploration of the political themes raised in the images, a historical background of the Four Freedoms speech, and an examination of the visual culture significance of the images.

The lecture "The Impact of Fear on Contemporary Political Dialogue" was delivered by Dr. Robert Bradley, a full professor in the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University, on February 18, 2010. The presentation examined the parallels that exist between the warnings about fear of Presidents Roosevelt and Obama in their addresses to the nation. Both presidents were confronting substantial domestic and foreign challenges to the nation, and both were trying to appeal to the nation not to surrender to fear but instead pursue a course of hope. Also included was a discussion of actions undertaken by both presidents that appear to contradict their messages on fear.

"A Manifesto of Power and Ideals: FDR's Four Freedoms Speech in Historical Perspective" by Dr. Ross Kennedy, an associate professor of history at Illinois State University and author of The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War 1, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security, was delivered on March 3, 2010. Dr. Kennedy's contention was that Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech had a profound impact on international affairs, directly contributing to Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union. The speech also provided a framework for America's national security strategy for the next fifty years.
“Visual Culture and American Modernism in the 1930s and 1940s: Figuration and Abstraction” was presented by Dr. Melissa Johnson, assistant professor of art history at Illinois State University and coordinator of the master’s program in Visual Culture Sequence, on April 6, 2010. Her presentation examined Norman Rockwell in the context of American art in the thirties and forties and the interdisciplinary field of visual culture. She also addressed the change in scholars’ evaluation of Rockwell, who has historically been seen as “illustrator” rather than an “artist.”

WEBSITE
A website was created that included information about the lecture series; curricular teaching resources available online related to FDR’s Four Freedoms speech; contact information for tours; and online resources related to the exhibit artists, Four Freedoms speech, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The lectures were recorded and made available as podcasts from the site.

THE COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE
The authors would like to examine their efforts through the lens of Dr. Dick Raspa and Dane Ward’s book, The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe, which describes a truly collaborative relationship, as opposed to mere coordination of efforts. Raspa and Ward highlight their “Five Ps of Collaboration”: passion, playfulness, project, persistence, and promotion.

The first two elements, passion, and playfulness, defined as the “capacity to engage an enterprise deeply—mind, heart, and spirit—all parts of us brought into the action of the moment” will be examined first.

The exhibit grew out of a passion shared at a conference. Kahl and Paterson attended the American Association of State College and Universities’ American Democracy Project (ADP) National Meeting in June 2009. The annual conferences focus on efforts by campuses nationwide to encourage the development of civic and political engagement among students. It is a very inspirational environment that focuses on all types of collaborative efforts by faculty and students; campus and community groups; academic and student affairs; and so on.

The conference displayed visually striking, movie-sized posters from the Thoughts on Democracy exhibit. ADP’s executive director saw the posters during his travels to Florida. ADP contacted the Wolfsonian and found that the images were available for licensing. At a lunch, the authors began discussing how much they enjoyed the posters.

The authors also shared a passion for providing opportunities to students—through academic affairs services and events for Paterson and public library services for Kahl. Furthermore, both understood the importance of offering cocurricular resources by nonacademic units. They both believe colleges and universities should be intentional in creating environments that assist students in their intellectual and personal growth. They shared a commitment to the developing civic engagement skills in our students that were also important to the university. Civic engagement is one of five core values of the university’s strategic plan, Educating Illinois:

Illinois State University prepares students to be informed and engaged citizens who will promote and further the collective goals of society. The University promotes active learning experiences through which students will gain an awareness and understanding of civic engagement as a lifelong responsibility. Furthermore, the University encourages faculty and staff to serve as engaged civic leaders and role models promoting the quality of life for all citizens through collaborative and individual action.

Raspa and Ward’s third P is the project where “participants may contribute their ideas and energies.” Both authors wanted to bring the posters to campus. But they quickly realized much more could be offered. They discussed a speaker series that would focus both on artistic themes of the exhibit, as well as the historical and political significance of the works. Previous efforts by the ADP on campus had primarily appealed to the humanities and social sciences. There had not been any programming relating to the fine or performing arts.

The project built upon institutional and personal expertise. The Dean of Students office offers extensive programming, so a student affairs official such as Paterson has experience with program planning, contracting, and vendor relations.

Milner Library had hosted exhibits previously, such as the National Endowment for the Arts’ Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation, Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America, and John Adams Unbound. These exhibits included speakers, curricular materials, and opening receptions. In addition to the exhibits, Milner had been offering exten-
When Paterson and Kahl sat down at the conference lunch, they knew each other through their work with ADP, but had not worked together professionally in any other context. Despite a similar commitment to helping students and the sharing of a plaza between their two adjoining buildings, there had been little interaction between Milner Library and the Dean of Students office. The two units’ limited dealings in the past had not included programming, but centered on the Passages orientation weekend that welcomes students to campus. Milner had provided classroom space and tours to support newly arriving students.

Despite the lack of previous experiences to draw on, Kahl and Paterson’s shared passion to bring this exhibit to campus provided an opportunity for the two units to closely work together for the first time. In doing so, they encountered the fourth of Raspa and Ward’s five Ps, persistence. Raspa and Ward noted that “our institutions are not typically organized to promote collaboration beyond our disciplines.” So academic collaborators have to push beyond disciplinary isolation by having “the desire and commitment to find others with whom you can talk and collaborate.”

The project required a committed collaborative effort. This collaboration extended beyond Kahl and Paterson by relying on the skills of Milner Library faculty and staff. Milner librarians and staff provided guidance on poster production, the existing library picture hanging system, and outreach to K-12 classes.

The opening reception had a welcome by President Al Bowman and the Dean of University Libraries, Cheryl Elzy, displayed all the posters, and offered forties-themed food and music. The authors relied on the expertise of the Milner Library Public Relations Committee. The committee selected and arranged the catering, music, and equipment rental.

The opening reception and poster production incurred significant expenses. Both authors were able to secure funding through ADP and Friends of Milner Library.

The engaging exhibit and accompanying lectures were examples of the fifth P, promote, because they were “initiatives that enhance internal and external communication.”

Promotion relied heavily on the expertise, once again, of the Milner Library Public Relations Committee. The committee has been active since 1994 and has developed a well-organized process. An initial planning meeting occurred, and a marketing plan was developed. The meeting reviewed options for marketing and events. The marketing plan highlighted the various options for exposure, including posters, mailings, flyers, signs, digital signage, invitations, and so on. The exhibit website was discussed.

Communication was done both on and off campus. The Public Relations Committee has a mailing list that sends out press releases to campus, Friends of Milner Library members, library staff retirees, local media outlets, and so forth. The exhibit also collaborated with the Teaching with Primary Sources department, whose mailing list reaches over five hundred community K-12 teachers. Announcements were sent via campus Listservs, such as ISU-Teach, which facilitates discussion on teaching and learning, and ISU-CIVICENGAGEMENT, which offers a forum for sharing information about civic engagement. In addition to campus- and community-wide marketing, special attention was paid to inviting target audiences to different portions of the overall program.

The promotion of the event led to an unexpected opportunity. A teacher from a local elementary school read about the exhibit and contacted Kahl. The school had recently asked students to write essays on two of the Four Freedoms. The essays were evaluated by ISU’s ROTC cadets, who had been working with the school’s students as part of the Cadets Helping Kids program. The winning essays were scanned and displayed on a poster for the last month of the exhibit. The poster was presented to the school at an assembly honoring the essay winners.

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on experience, the following suggestions may be useful to others interested in similar efforts.

• Utilize everyone’s expertise. Kahl had a disciplinary background in political science and a lifelong interest in military history, knew the library resources, and had witnessed Milner Library’s successful hosting and marketing of exhibits and lecture series. Paterson had the experience reviewing and negotiating contracts and working with local vendors to produce the posters. Librarians and library staff—especially Judy Bee, Maureen Brunsdale, Sarah Dick, Jan Johnson, Kathleen Lonbom, and
Toni Tucker—shared their expertise about exhibits, poster displays, public relations, and working with K–12 classes.

- Determine target audiences and develop marketing materials accordingly. This program was designed to reach multiple audiences—students, faculty, staff, and the Friends of the Milner Library association. It also was being promoted under the auspices of the ADP, which provided some additional marketing opportunities. To reach these various constituencies, a variety of marketing mediums were utilized to capture attention and participation.

- Widely share the program concept with others, and additional ideas and resources will come to you. The unsolicited contact by the elementary teacher concerning her students’ essays resulted in the added feature to the exhibit.

- Allow for plenty of lead time for program modifications and enhancement opportunities that emerge. The original program was designed as a poster exhibit. The opportunity to add lectures by faculty and the website with additional information and podcasts and involvement were possible because the exhibit was planned for the following semester rather than rushing to offer it as soon as school started in the fall. Even with this additional planning time, supplementary program ideas, which included having art and composition classes create responsive pieces to the exhibit, taking the exhibit out into the community, and creating an auditory self-guided tour of the exhibit, did not happen because time ran out.

Following the first submission of this chapter, the editors posed the question “Was it truly the luck of sitting next to each other at a lunch and realizing you had a shared interest that resulted in the idea for (and commitment to) a joint program?”

The question is a good one. For many colleagues across the country, this type of collaboration might not have been nearly so easy. Rather than looking to leverage each other’s strengths, the authors might have instead been territorial and worried about who would do the work and who would get the credit—or worse yet, not been willing to initiate the conversation at all: a “them versus us” mindset.

Instead, the question reminds the authors that Illinois State University has developed a campus culture of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs frequently collaborating and consistently recognizing each other as partners in the educational process. So whereas on many campuses a joint effort between student affairs and the library may not come to mind automatically or occur easily, at Illinois State it does, and the American Democracy Project framework provided the impetus for this particular collaboration.

Notes
6. Ibid., 9.
10. Ibid., 8.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 11.