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Increasing Resources in Tough Times: A New Funding Model for the Purdue University Career Wiki

George Bergstrom
Purdue University - Main Campus, gbergstr@gmail.com

Mary Dugan
Purdue University - Main Campus, mdugan@purdue.edu

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Thriving in Tough Economic Times

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INCREASING RESOURCES IN TOUGH TIMES

A New Funding Model for the Purdue University Career Wiki

George Bergstrom and Mary Dugan

THE WORLD ECONOMIC situation has resulted in rising costs and shrinking budgets for universities, and the library is not immune to these realities. We are faced with a need not just to be very careful when spending monograph and serial funds but to be creative in finding ways to make the dollars stretch. When we have a real concern on campus requiring an innovative solution, one aspect of that solution must be a pragmatic awareness of the cost, and perhaps the most creativity must therein be applied. Librarians cannot be shy when it comes to instructing users that library resources are not free but have to be paid for with limited funds and that those who want to share resources could also share in the expenses. This approach has the potential to not only procure more resources for the students but build relationships across campus.

BACKGROUND

The Management and Economics Library (MEL) at Purdue University provides research and curriculum support to undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs in the Krannert School of Management and in agricultural economics, consumer family sciences, and interdisciplinary programs such

as homeland security and entrepreneurship. The MEL faculty have an excellent working relationship with the teaching faculty in these programs, and they strive to customize and enhance services whenever the opportunity is presented. Such an opportunity was recognized in 2006 when the dean of Krannert was looking for a solution to a persistent problem underlying the job-seeking activities of graduating seniors. Feedback from some of the companies who visited the campus for job fairs indicated that the students did not have the kind of in-depth knowledge about their company that would impress the recruiters. The dean believed that this was not a reflection of the students' lack of interest, merely a lack of applying their research skills to a real-life need. The head librarian knew that MEL had resources that could alleviate this problem.

In December 2006, staff from the university's libraries and career offices met to discuss resources that would solve this problem, and they discovered overlapping subscriptions. This discovery led to the recognition of a need for better communication. To achieve this improved communication, a wiki was proposed that also became an opportunity to develop a new service for students. Before this meeting, career offices staff had not recognized the libraries' resources as tools for themselves and their constituents. To be successful, it was important that the libraries and career offices all regarded this as both a cooperative partnership and a means of increasing resources that would benefit all.

Prior to the collaboration, the MEL faculty were involved with career search assistance for third-year management students. A required course in the Krannert School of Management for these students is focused on preparing for job searches and internships. During the course, MEL librarians present a lecture to the class with general information about the library and, most important, highlight the company information databases. The emphasis during these lectures is that these databases can help students prepare for interviewing by learning about the companies for which they want to work. In addition to this very specific class, MEL librarians have participated in workshops sponsored by the career offices. However, none of these incidental interactions resulted in those offices sustaining an awareness of all the services and resources offered by the library. Neither did any of the career offices seem to have a reciprocal awareness of each other's goals, services, and resources.

WHERE TO START

To start building a base for cooperation, MEL librarians contacted the directors of the three major campus career offices. At the first roundtable meeting,

everyone reported on the electronic and hard copy resources they purchased and furnished a wish list for future purchases. It was apparent that efforts and resources were being duplicated among these offices and the libraries and that pooling resources would be an advantage to all. It was also recognized that any combined effort would be most effective if a central online career web space could be set up to function as a portal for all online career resources and to be a gateway to the participating career offices. To accomplish this, the business reference librarian headed up the establishment of the Purdue University Career Wiki. The basic wiki was created in early 2008 with a soft rollout during the spring 2008 semester and the official launch in August. Use of a wiki allowed representatives from all units involved to contribute content.

FUNDING

The resource development librarian concentrated on the goal of identifying partnership opportunities for funding, with each unit contributing to the

FIRST PARTNERS: MAJOR CAREER OFFICES

Center for Career Opportunities: The center provides career development support and job search services, engaging students and alumni in exploring career options and developing effective job search skills. It also facilitates activities that connect students and alumni with employers and develops partnerships with Purdue colleges, schools, and other stakeholders.

Krannert Graduate Career Services: This unit is focused on students in the professional master's degree programs. Its directive is to help all students in these programs secure one or more job offers.

Krannert Undergraduate Career Services: This unit is devoted exclusively to the school's undergraduate students, providing on-campus recruiting, resume assessment, presentations on interviewing skills, and instruction in business etiquette. The staff teaches a course emphasizing academic planning, career exploration, and job search strategies, including video-recorded mock interviews.

purchase of electronic resources jointly agreed on by the group. This type of financial alliance was a well-established practice by which MEL was regularly able to purchase databases and data sets with contributions from academic units such as the school of management. This would be the first time, though, that this type of fiscal cooperation would be attempted among the libraries and nonacademic units.

Through informal conversations, e-mail, and phone calls, the representatives of the career offices and the librarians discussed several databases that they believed would be most useful and have the necessary wide appeal among their colleagues. Several staff expressed a preference for a database that offered information about internships; others favored guides for finding a job outside the United States. Specific features were also singled out: CareerBeam was preferred by at least one director because it did not include a cookie-cutter resume template but instead listed the features that a good resume should include. This component was also favored by the librarians, since it would enhance the objective of increasing student information literacy.

By May 2007, Vault Online, CareerBeam, Plunkett Research, WetFeet Online, and CareerSearch were identified as the databases of most interest. The career offices were willing to defer management of the database acquisitions to the resource development librarian because of her previous experience in managing cooperative purchases. Vendor database demonstrations were a high priority for the group, so the acquisition process had to include them. Clearly the efforts of the librarian would save career staff time and minimize their individual efforts. The resource development librarian contacted the vendors chosen by the group to obtain the basic information that the four units (MEL, Center for Career Opportunities, Krannert Graduate Career Services, and Krannert Undergraduate Career Services) required in order to begin the database selection process. The primary information they needed to make decisions about scheduling demonstrations and possible purchase included cost, mode of access, number of simultaneous users, the mode of campuswide access, training, promotional assistance, and access for alumni. The first vendor demonstration was recognized by all in attendance as an important cooperation for the group.

When one database, CareerBeam, emerged as having the greatest appeal to all of the units involved, the head librarian of MEL provided the top-level leadership needed to gather funds. She approached the associate dean for administration and planning at Krannert, who agreed to contribute funds along with the career offices. According to the agreement between the associate dean and the head librarian, Krannert's contribution to the resource was dependent on contributions of the other career offices. The Center for Career Opportunities contributed 40 percent, Graduate Career Services gave

10 percent, Krannert's executive master's program gave 10 percent, MEL contributed 20 percent, and the dean's office gave the final 20 percent. This cooperative pay plan has subsequently been used several times throughout this project, with the percentages changing according to each unit's budget and need for the resource. Collaborative purchases thus far have been for CareerBeam, Uniworld, Career Spots, and Big Guide.

THE GROUP GROWS

The business reference librarian has identified thirty-five offices on campus that offer some level of career services, from a task informally assigned to an administrative assistant to departmental career professionals. He has contacted these groups through e-mail, delineating the details of the project and extending an invitation to join. Responses were moderate, but by the end of summer 2008 five new career units were on board. As conversations began with these additional units, it became clear that we needed to develop tiers of involvement in order to minimize perceived impediments to participation. Thus, the three newest groups are at the minimal level of link exchange wherein the career wiki includes a link to these offices and they link back to the wiki.

Since the formation of the career wiki collaborative group, the savings derived from the elimination of the duplicate licenses of three databases have allowed the addition of four databases. Of the ten offices represented in this collaborative effort, six have currently provided funds to assist in the purchase of one or more of these additional resources. This has made up 44 percent of the cost of the seven career-related databases provided since the beginning of the effort. Everyone involved considers alumni part of their constituency, and the next target is to begin to allow alumni access to these resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

The wiki group has learned several lessons: how to bring on new partners, how to review potential resources, and, most important, how to collaborate in the purchase of these new resources. In spring semester 2010, we held a meeting to discuss a new funding model, currently dubbed "pay-to-play." We shared information about the resources purchased by the libraries to support the academic mission of the university as well as all the resources that are primarily for career-related services. For the first year, when a new resource was chosen the resource development librarian spent significant time collecting the contributions from as many partners as possible to distribute the

costs. Although this has worked to date, disadvantages include the amount of library staff time involved, the constant appearance that the library is asking for money, and the need to go back to these groups every time a resource contract needs to be renewed. The new model will allow the partners to contribute a dollar amount to the career wiki group once each fiscal year based on their ability and budget, to be used to fund cooperative purchases. The libraries will then use that pool to facilitate the purchase of these resources. Although it is agreed that all students must benefit from the resources and the opinions of all career offices will be solicited, the groups that contribute funds will have the final say in the use of those funds.

The group has also discussed assessment and decided that usage data will be monitored, both usage of the resources available on the wiki and data on click-through traffic (hits on the groups' websites that come from the wiki). Librarians recognize that an assessment of potential downsides must also be addressed. For example, other departments may not have funds recurring for the annual renewal of jointly purchased databases. If a career office withdraws financial support for a database, we need a contingency plan. Additionally, efforts are under way to enhance marketing of the wiki and staff training.

CONCLUSIONS

This collaboration has not been a quick fix or temporary patch but a solution that is sustainable. As a group we have increased efficiencies in the procurement of resources, awareness of the services offered by the partner units, and cooperative efforts in training and preparation of our students for all aspects of the career search process. We have created a one-stop-shop web portal for our group that is available to all university constituents. We have begun streamlining the procurement process that will create a single libraries' fund to which the career offices will contribute for the joint purchase of established and proposed resources. The group has begun discussing inclusion of Purdue University's four regional campuses and the possibility of adding alumni access to the contract of these career databases.

The group will need to continue assessment of the new funding model with attention paid to the workloads of staff in all units and the reliance of the career offices on library resources. Although we hope eventually to get all units contributing to this fund, we need to insulate the fund from the possibility of one or more units targeting it for budgetary cuts. This collaborative effort between library, academic units, and nonacademic units on the Purdue University campus adds an adaptable tool in our financial arsenal and promises to yield more benefits for the library, the career offices, and, most important, our students.