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feature

From High School Users College Students Grow

Providing Academic Library Research Opportunities to High School Students

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The University of Nebraska was chartered by the Nebraska Legislature in 1869 as the state's land-grant higher education institution "to afford to the inhabitants of this State the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of literature, science and the arts."[1] The University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) University Libraries take this land-grant mission seriously, serving as a statewide resource and making the research collection available throughout the state to Nebraska citizens. The focus of this article is on the University Libraries' service to one particular group of citizens—high school students. In the late 1980s, the libraries developed a high school users program as part of the library's outreach efforts.

Early History of the High School Users Program

Initially, the purpose of the high school users program was to provide area high school students with additional resources not available in the libraries and media centers of the school district in Lincoln, Nebraska. This service was offered to high school students from four Lincoln high schools who had been identified as gifted. It was felt that this group would be the most likely to attend college and would profit the most from the opportunity to acquaint themselves with doing research in an academic library.

Initially, no special parameters were set for students participating in the program, primarily because we felt that we were working with a small enough contingent of students that we could use our existing community user circulation policies. At the time, any individual proving to be at least eighteen years of age and a resident of Nebraska could apply for a community user library card. These individuals were able to check out up to ninety-nine items, including monographs and circulating bound periodicals, with twelve- to twenty-eight-day renewals possible. We decided to set aside the minimum age requirement and treat students in the high school user program as if they were community users.

Students visited the library with their instructor for a tour and basic instruction in research methods. We encouraged the schools' contact people (usually school library media specialists [SLMSs]) to instruct the students and teachers in the use of the UNL library catalog prior to their visit to the library. At the conclusion of the scheduled visit to the library, students were able to apply for library cards and to check out materials.

Within just a few years library staff began to notice a much larger number of high school students applying for library cards and, not surprisingly, more problems with lost books and overdue fines. While we continued to believe that the program was an important part of the services the University Libraries could provide, we knew that something had to change. In discussions with SLMSs, teachers, and the director of the district media office, we discovered that more than just gifted students were participating in the program. SLMSs felt that it was unfair not to include other students participating in the same classes as those identified as

gifted. It became apparent that we needed to develop new policies for this new and appreciably larger user population, as the community user policies were no longer serving our needs.

Changes in the High School Users Program

In 1990 new policies were developed for the high school user program. Since most of the students in the program were under age eighteen, we set the age limit for the program at sixteen. Some, although very few, exceptions have been made for younger students, as most students under age sixteen are not academically prepared to use the types of materials we can provide in our university library. In addition, the program is available only during the academic year.

Originally, cards issued to high school students were distinctively colored, had a May 1 expiration date, and were created by the circulation staff for each user. This involved staff/student assistant time as well as the expense of materials, such as the card and laminating sleeve. We found that many cards were only used on the day of the visit, and some were not used at all. At the beginning of the 1999/2000 school year we moved from paper cards to a virtual card, building a patron record from information on the forms. Students must present a current picture ID (usually a driver's license) to check out materials. This system seems to be working well.

We allow only ten items on the patron record, do not loan bound periodicals, and allow only one twenty-eight-day renewal. While we prefer that high school students check out books solely from Love Library, our main library on campus, if students find books in one of our nine branches that are useful they are not prohibited from checking them out. Probably the most important change from the original program is that when books are returned students must request a receipt. This change has dramatically reduced the number of books that students claim they returned, and subsequently, the amount of time staff members spend searching the stacks for these books. If the student cannot produce a receipt and the book cannot be found, the student is liable for the cost of the book.

Another rather dramatic change we made was in the way we attempted to collect lost book and fine revenue. In the past, we would ask for a parental signature on the permission sheet, indicating that the parent would accept responsibility for any payments due to the University Libraries. We discovered that many parents did not read the form. When contacted regarding payment for lost books and fines, some parents indicated that they did not realize the ramifications of their signature and were unwilling to meet the financial obligations of their child's actions. We changed our approach and asked that the school, or school system, be responsible for any financial obligations. If the books were not returned or late fees were not paid, the school would be ineligible to participate in the program until fines and book charges were paid. At first this was problematic; some principals, when faced with a bill, told us they had not been informed by the school's contact person that the school would be held responsible. During the last few years, however, we have had much greater success with schools working with students to return materials.

Day-to-Day Operation for the High School Users Program

Administratively, the high school users program is part of the circulation unit. An employee from circulation coordinates the daily operations of the program, including record keeping, orientation sessions, and tours. Each summer, the coordinator develops an information packet to send to SLMSs in the participating schools. The packets are mailed a few weeks before school starts so that SLMSs have time to prepare for their school's participation. The packet contains a contact registration form, a master copy of the patron registration form that can be duplicated to provide as many as are needed, and a copy of our policies (see appendix for examples of forms). Policies are also available on the University Libraries Web site as well.[2] The coordinator uses e-mail to keep students, SLMSs, and other contact people up to date on due dates and other news.

As noted earlier, the program began with only four Lincoln high schools participating. Over the years, the number of schools who have asked to participate has grown. As the figure shows, twenty-six high schools participated in the program in 2000/2001. More than one thousand students have received tours and basic research methods instruction. Participating schools include private schools as well as schools as far away as a two-hour bus ride.

In the initial years of the program, much of the use of the collection was targeted toward basic reference sources that the local school district was unable to afford. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. Students are now using the collections at UNL to enhance the preliminary research done in their school libraries rather than depending on the university to meet their basic research needs.

Outreach and Public Relations

In the past few years, the University Libraries has realized that the high school users program could be used by the university as a public relations tool. The primary users of the program are high school juniors and seniors, students who may be contemplating attending the university. Research indicates that students who have had successful experiences in an academic setting at the high school level are more likely to attempt to use the library once they arrive at college.[3] We issue virtual cards to all students who are eligible, although not all students actually use our resources. As the figure indicates, of the 1,411 students who attended orientation, 972 applied for a library card. These 972 students then checked out 4,651 books. We do not know how many of these students may be accessing the electronic resources, either during their initial visit to campus or on subsequent visits. Some students attend the orientation tour and research session and register for a library card, but then do not

Figure

University of Nebraska–Lincoln University Libraries High School Users Program 2000–2001 Selected Facts

- 26 high schools enrolled and 62 sessions were offered
- 1,031 high school students participated in tours and basic research methods instruction
- 4,124 books were checked out
- 39 tours were conducted in conjunction with the program

check out any materials. Undoubtedly many of these students are using our electronic resources, including our online catalog, as well as the multitude of electronic databases we provide, many of which are full-text. Regardless of whether or not materials are checked out, students who attend the orientation are at least becoming familiar with Love Library and have been exposed to the wide range of materials they will find at a university library.

Testing Out of Library 110

Most freshman at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln are required to take Introduction to Library Research (LI 110), a one-credit hour class designed to teach basic information skills to incoming freshmen and transfer students. The course familiarizes students with electronic resources as well as introduces them to the library services and resources at UNL. We believe that those UNL freshmen who have participated in the high school users program have some proficiency in doing research in an automated research library environment. Therefore, they are given the opportunity to test out of LI 110 when they arrive on campus in the fall.

Early each summer the dean of libraries sends a letter explaining LI 110 and the test-out option to any incoming freshman that participated in the high school user program and who checked out at least one book. The number of students who sign up for the exam and then score a passing grade is rather small. In August 2000, twenty-three incoming freshman who had been past participants in the high school users program signed up to take the test-out exam. Of that number, fifteen took the exam and two passed. Previous years' numbers are also low: one pass in 1997, four passes in 1998, and five passes in 1999. We do not find this discouraging, as we believe LI 110 is an important part of all students' academic coursework and encourage all students to take the course. Providing the test-out option to the participants in our high school users program is really a public relations tool rather than an attempt to reduce the number of students taking the course.

Conclusion

The University Libraries' high school users program has grown from a small operation into a well-developed program. The resources of a large academic research library are made available to students so they may complete their high school coursework with a wider range of resources and, possibly, gain expertise in the rigorous research needed for their college courses.

The high school users program provides yet another opportunity for the University Libraries to successfully fulfill its land-grant role and service obligation to the citizens of Nebraska while serving as a public relations tool. Regardless of whether or not participants decide to attend the University of Nebraska, the libraries have helped to prepare young Nebraskans for their college experiences and their future information needs. ●

References

1. Robert Knoll, *Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska* (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Pr., 1995).
2. University of Nebraska–Lincoln, High School Users Program, 24 July 2000, <www.unl.edu/libr/circ/highschool.html>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2001.
3. M. E. Joseph, "The Cure for Library Anxiety: It May Not Be What You Think," *Catholic Library World* 63 (Oct.–Dec. 1991): 111–14.

Appendix A. High School User Program Forms

UNL School at the Library Program—Contact Person Form

This form is to be completed and signed by the designated school contact person and returned to the Circulation Department at Love Library at the following address. Return this form to:

Circulation Department, UNL–SLIP Coordinator, Love Library, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Lincoln NE 68588-0410
Telephone: (402) 472-2556 Fax: (402) 472-5131

No student IRIS record will be created until this form is received by the SLIP coordinator.

Please print

Contact: Person _____ School _____

Address: Street _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____-_____ Email _____

Telephone (_____) _____ fax (_____) _____

Approximate number of students in program _____

Last day of school _____

Last day for seniors _____

As contact person for my school, I will explain to the students their responsibilities and monitor their use and return of UNL materials and payment of fines for late, damaged or lost books. The school that I represent will also be made aware of all responsibilities connected with the UNL-SLIP program.

Contact Person's Signature _____ Date_____

UNL date received _____

UNL School at the Library Program—Student Form

I am responsible for reading the policies stated below. By signing this form, I agree that I understand and will comply with these policies and procedures. *I understand that non-compliance will result in the suspension of my UNL library privileges and restrict my school's use of the program in the future.*

__ I am enrolled in a Public or Private School.
__ I am at least 16 years of age.
__ My UNL- high school borrowing privileges will be honored from September 1 to May 1, of the current school year.
__ I am limited to ten items on my library record at any one time.
__ I may renew any item one time.
__ I can not check out bound periodicals.
__ I will return all materials to Love Library, Circulation Desk and ask for a receipt.
__ I am responsible for any UNL materials that I have accidentally returned to another library.
__ I am responsible for payment of my fines, replacement of books, or repair of damaged books.
__ I understand that I can not check out UNL library materials without proper identification.
__ I understand that I am responsible for my personal belongings and my personal safety can not be guaranteed if I enter a restricted construction area.
__ I will comply with UNL Library Circulation policies and procedures.

Please print

Name (last, first, middle initial) _____

Social Security Number: _____ - _____ - _____

Home address: Street _____ City _____

State _____ zip_____ - _____

Email _____ Date of birth _____ / _____ /_____

IMPORTANT: are you a HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR? Yes_____ no_____

School address: School_____

Street_____

City_____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

STUDENT

I have read the above policies and understand my responsibilities.

Student's Signature _____ Date _____

CONTACT PERSON

I acknowledge that this student is enrolled in this school, and has my permission to participate in this program.

Contact Person's Signature: _____ Date _____

Parent's Signature: (Optional) _____ Date _____

UNL School at the Library Program

The growing demand for information and the added need to provide a wide variety of resources have created an increased awareness of the importance of developing strong information skills and strategies among our students. The University of Nebraska - Lincoln Libraries offer a program to public and private school teachers and media specialists, that allows their students to borrow materials from the UNL Libraries. SLIP is provided as a courtesy to schools that feel their students would benefit from being able to do research at a major university library. UNL - SLIP enrollment will be valid from September 1 to May 1, of this school year; students will only be able to use material in-house after May 1.

Enclosed you will find the student form and school contact form, the student form must have both the student's and the contact person's signature, a parent's signature is optional. Please feel free to reproduce as many copies of any form as are needed. *It is the responsibility of the contact person to be sure that the students using the program understand the guidelines. Any financial obligation not met by students at the end of the school's academic year becomes the responsibility of the high school and needs to be resolved prior to the next academic year. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries reserve the right to restrict participation in this program, by student or school.* Take the time to go over the policies so that each student understands his/her part. The contact person should also monitor the return of materials in a timely manner and payment of fines (for overdue, lost, recalled or damaged University Library materials).

Please return the forms as soon as possible.

Circulation Desk
UNL - SLIP Coordinator
Love Library
University of Nebraska @ Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0410

Please allow 5 business days for processing of forms and creation of a library record. Once the student is enrolled in SLIP, he/she will be able to check out research materials with proper picture identification such as a Learners Permit, School ID card or Drivers License. Her/his IRIS record will serve as a virtual library card. Large groups that arrive unexpectedly can not be guaranteed immediate enrollment. Individual students may obtain enrollment at the circulation desk during business hours as long as they have the proper identification and school contact form is on file.

Library staff will offer a basic tour of the resources available in the library and how to find them. If you are interested in a tour, please contact the Circulation Department at (402) 472-2556 and ask for Keri. The contact person is responsible for notifying Circulation of the date and time of arrival of your group. Even if you do not require a tour, it is in your best interest to inform us of your visit so that additional staff can be available if needed.

- This program is provided as a community courtesy to schools.
- Students must be at least 16yrs old, and enrolled in a private or public school.
- Students eighteen or over, still in high school, will be part of this program.
- All accrued student fines will be the final responsibility of the school.
- All forms must be filled out properly, and signed.

The UNL Libraries is accessible. Please feel free to request additional services for those who may need it. Be aware that Love Library has begun a three-year renovation project.

Forms and additional information about the program are available on our Web site: http://iris.unl.edu.