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E-JASL: The Electronic Journal of Academic
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Fall 2004

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Tucker, J. Cory, "University Library Partnerships: Promoting Economic Development" (2004). *E-JASL 1999-2009 (volumes 1-10)*. 45.
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v.5 no.2-3 (Fall 2004)

University Library Partnerships: Promoting Economic Development



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Abstract

The article discusses an innovative partnership at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). The collaborative project involves the UNLV Libraries and the Nevada Small Business Development Center, which is affiliated with the College of Business. The partnership was created to assist the University's goal of promoting economic development in the Las Vegas and Southern Nevada region.

Background

Since 1995, the University of Nevada Las Vegas has conducted an annual campus-wide strategic planning process to help focus university educational, service and research projects. One goal of the strategic plan involves the University's promotion of economic development in Southern Nevada through job creation, increasing worker skills and creating new businesses (UNLV, 2001). In late 2001 a new section was added to the strategic plan. The University created twelve research macrothemes that describe current and emerging academic research strengths on the campus. One specific macrotheme is Business and Economic Development, Diversification, and Management. The charge for this macrotheme is:

Business and Economic Development, Diversification, and Management evaluates the factors and processes within a community that determine job creation, increase job skills and wages within the labor force, and promote development of regional industries and businesses. Research in this area provides critical analysis, business advice, and technological expertise about economic trends and technical needs to local and regional stakeholders such as city, county, and state governments; development authorities; enterprise corporations; and area chambers of commerce. Examples of such groups include the Center for Energy Research, Center for Workforce Development and Occupational Research, Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies, Cannon Center for Survey Research, Center for Health Information Analysis, and the UNLV Research Foundation (UNLV, 2001).

As a result of the strategic planning process, UNLV Libraries created a partnership with the Nevada Small Business Development Center (NSBDC), which is an affiliate of both the Small Business Administration and the College of Business.

Nevada Small Business Development Center

The Nevada Small Business Development Center (NSBDC) plays a vital role in economic development in the Southern Nevada region. The NSBDC is funded through a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration, the University of Nevada Las Vegas, University of Nevada Reno, the State of Nevada Commission on Economic Development and the Nevada Environmental Protection Agency. The NSBDC assists small business enterprises throughout the state of Nevada by helping them plan their growth potential and develop and maintain professional management skills. Other programs include management training, counseling services, pre-qualification loan program, geographic information systems, business environmental program and safety assistance services.

The important community role of the NSBDC is illustrated by the following statistics. Over 97% of the businesses in the state of Nevada employ less than 100 people. Nearly 60% of Nevada employees work for a small business, representing 44,000 small businesses and over 600,000 employees, with approximately 93% of all new jobs being created by small businesses. Small businesses face an annual regulatory burden estimated at \$6,975 per employee, a burden nearly 60% above those facing businesses employing over 500 employees (Nevada Small Business Development Center, 2002).

In 2002 (latest data available), the NSBDC assisted over 11,000 existing and start-up businesses through individualized business counseling, business training and workshops, environmental compliance assessments, workplace safety and health assistance and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise education and certification assistance. In 2002 the NSBDC assisted clients in acquiring \$7.6 million of new capital. Clients reported 230 jobs were created and 73 jobs retained. The NSBDC website also received over 36,000 hits (Nevada Small Business Development Center, 2002).

Partnership

The partnership involves assisting with the research and educational aspects of the NSBDC's services. Lied Library's participation involves use of classrooms for instruction, librarians to conduct bibliographic instruction sessions and access to library resources for NSBDC clients. Lied Library also created a Web Portal to assist clients with their research.

Goals

The collaborative partnership between UNLV Libraries and the Nevada Small Business Development Center (NSBDC) has several goals. The goals include:

1. Develop a partnership to meet University and Business Macrotheme goals.
2. Acquire small business resources for utilization by several groups of people including NSBDC clients, the UNLV faculty, staff, students and the southern Nevada business community.
3. Focus on enhancing research capacities in small business and entrepreneurship for the Las Vegas and Southern Nevada region.
4. Provide research expertise to help foster economic growth and new business development in the Las Vegas and Southern Nevada region.

Partnership Benefits

The partnership will benefit the University, UNLV Libraries and the NSBDC.

UNIVERSITY & CAMPUS BENEFITS

The collaborative partnership between UNLV Libraries and the NSBDC will have a significant impact on the University. The collaborative effort combines the strengths of two university departments to assist the business community in the Las Vegas and Southern Nevada region. This collaboration allows both departments to combine their research expertise to assist the business community and promote economic development. The collaborative effort is also an outreach project where the business community is brought to the University to experience its resources and services. Additionally, the partnership will assist the University in achieving Goal #4. Specifically, it will help with “encouraging programs that serve regional needs and achieve national distinction.” The NSBDC is currently serving regional needs through its counseling of small business owners and entrepreneurs. The partnership between UNLV Libraries and the NSBDC will enhance the existing program. The partnership will help the University “serve regional needs” through job creation, increasing worker skills and creating new businesses.

The partnership will also advance the current Business and Economic Development, Diversification and Management Macrotheme. Specifically, the partnership will assist in job creation, increase job skills and wages within the labor force, and promote development of regional industries and businesses. This collaboration will allow the University to increase community contacts and enhance the positive profile of UNLV in the community. This project illustrates UNLV’s efforts to be a leader in the economic development of the Las Vegas and Southern Nevada region. Additionally, the project

will build relationships with area businesses and industry. The growth and economic development of the Las Vegas area will bring in additional spending and tax revenues for local and regional economies.

Students and faculty at UNVL will benefit as well. The College of Business currently teaches classes in small business and entrepreneurship. Other classes taught by the College of Business have a project component that deals with starting a business. Currently, the 3,704 students in the College of Business are underserved in the areas of marketing research, small business and entrepreneurship. A small business collection will assist in both faculty and student research and curriculum needs.

LIBRARY BENEFITS

UNLV Libraries will experience short-term and long-term benefits as a result of this Partnership. The partnership will allow the library to begin an innovative collaborative effort that is unique to academic libraries. Currently, a majority of small business/library ventures are taking place in public libraries. Academic libraries have yet to attempt this type of partnership. Currently, the collection of library materials related to small business is not adequately meeting the curricular needs of the campus community. In the short term, the ability to purchase new resources will immediately strengthen and enhance the library's collection. The additional resources improve the librarian's and library staff's ability to assist library patrons with small business inquiries. Lied Library continues to have numerous inquiries from the public that relate to starting up a business. Also, these additional items will enhance research efforts by faculty and students in the area of small business and entrepreneurship. These resources will also be beneficial to all 205 business classes taught by the College of Business.

NSBDC BENEFITS

The NSBDC will also reap several benefits from this partnership. Currently, clients of the NSBDC do not have a centralized program to assist them with their research needs. Lied Library can assist counselors at the NSBDC and their clients by donating their research expertise. Lied Library can assist clients by helping them perform research more efficiently. In addition, Lied Library can help clients find more reliable, in-depth information. The research assistance will have a direct impact on the success of these small businesses. By conducting thorough research, small business owners will have more reliable information and make better informed business decisions.

Current Partnership Status

The first project involved writing a Planning Initiative Award (PIA) grant sponsored by the University. A grant was written in the Fall 2003 and was approved. The grant award

consists of \$2,500 for small business books for UNLV Libraries. The funds will be transferred in August 2004.

The second project was creating a Web Portal for NSBDC clients. The Web Portal was completed in Spring 2004. The Portal provides a gateway for library research information including small business websites, books, electronic databases and serials. The areas of small business covered include business planning, market and demographic research, industry and company information, taxation, importing and exporting and financing.

Starting in the Fall of 2004, the business librarian at UNLV Libraries will be conducting research sessions for NSBDC clients. The training sessions will be held in the University Libraries' instruction classrooms.

Beginning in the Fall of 2004, an assessment project will be implemented. Outcomes will be measured in several ways. First, use of UNLV Libraries by NSBDC clients will be monitored using question sheets at both reference desks. In addition, circulation and use data will be collected in regards to use of electronic resources, journals and circulation of books. The library will also create and administer a survey to NSBDC clients to evaluate the effectiveness of the research program. Finally, the NSBDC will collect its own data on businesses counseled, business assisted and jobs retained and created that relate to the existence of the UNLV Libraries/NSBDC partnership.

Conclusion

The partnership between the UNLV Libraries and the Nevada Small Business Development Center is an innovative collaboration in the academic librarianship field. This is a unique opportunity for academic libraries to not only help a University achieve its strategic goals, but it allows the library to have a direct social and economic impact on the surrounding area. In addition, the assistance provided to public patrons helps create a more positive image for the University.

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