Proposal: THE IDEA HUB

To: Dr. Gregg Geary, Dean – Biola University Library
From: Chuck Koontz – chuck.koontz@biola.edu
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Overview

This is a proposal that the Biola Library dedicate the currently unused space at the circle desk on the Middle Level as a collaborative, interactive space managed by our users. The Library would act as a support-level partner with Student Government and Academic Departments to plan one participatory exhibit per semester (Fall, Spring, Summer). Participatory exhibits are proven to inspire learning, increase attendance, and create a stronger sense of community.

Goals

1. **Demonstrate that we are a user-centered institution:** This would literally put our users at the center of what we do. Anyone walking in the front door will see something that communicates clearly, “This library is yours.”

2. **Increase synergy between the library and the community:**
   We dedicate space and resources; they provide creativity, word of mouth, and the unique appeal of something that has been created by peers.

Concept

The Library will provide “prime real estate” so that each user entering the library sees an exhibit/activity designed by the community in which they themselves can participate. The Library also provides staff time with a pre-defined scope. For example, a departmental liaison librarian can facilitate discussion about library resources available, and digitization services might also be offered to provide community members with high quality image files (but not physical prints) of
items in the Library collections. If technological equipment is required, Tech Commons could be consulted about the possibility of the loan of equipment for the duration of the exhibit.

Some examples of possible participatory exhibits include: Coloring pages made from digitized comic art out of Special Collections; PCs set up as gaming stations so students can test video game projects made by students in our B.A. in Game Design program; Puzzles made from historic photos out of Archives; Post-Its for students to write phrases that they can combine with other students’ phrases to make stories, then post a photo of the story to the library’s social media.

The exhibits don’t need to be expensive or complicated. They simply need to provide an opportunity for users to invite their peers to participate. The library functions primarily as a venue and support to the users themselves.

The proposed space is currently being used only minimally, and it is the ideal space for this kind of program. It will clearly and prominently demonstrate to our users that the library is focused on them, and they will have ample opportunity to participate.

Theoretical Foundations

In his *Atlas of New Librarianship*, David Lankes asserts, “The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities. Knowledge is created through conversation. Libraries are in the knowledge business, therefore the conversation business” (2011, p.63).

Nina Simon (Director of Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History), in her talk *Opening Up the Museum: Nina Simon @ TEDxSantaCruz*, describes the “Community as co-creator” (2014). When community members are invited to be creative, the artifacts they create become “social objects, [providing] opportunities to mediate conversations between strangers.” The outcomes for Simon’s Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History speak for themselves. In the first year after implementing these ‘co-
creator’ programs, attendance doubled and cashflow increased by more than ten times (Simon, 2014).

Sally Pewhairangi, in describing the library’s role within our communities, quotes David Lankes, “This platform is our infrastructure, but it is also the infrastructure of the community – co-owned” (2014). If it is co-owned, then the community must have the opportunity to exercise its ownership. Not in such a way that it impedes the necessary functions of the library, but an invitation to expressive participation nonetheless. Michael Stephens, in his book Heart of Librarianship, reflects on a thought from Serhan Ada, “Participation occurs when someone welcomed as a guest feels as though they have become a host... That’s an important consideration in our evolution as cultural institutions: how will we open the door and invite everyone inside to participate?” (2016, p.81).

This creative participation can take a variety of forms. Erinn Batykefer (co-founder of The Library as Incubator Project) argues that creativity is universal, and that it is important to see creativity as more than making things or being artistic. “Creativity is literally being able to imagine something that wasn’t there before. It makes something new... it could also be something ‘uncreative’ like your business model, or a work process, or a budget... That’s creativity. It’s problem solving” (Christopher, 2019). As an application in this case, the participatory programs don’t need to be artistic per se, but any kind of creative activity can facilitate connectedness, conversation, and knowledge.

Examples from Libraries

**Madison Library Takeover**

Library staff invited proposals for self-managed programs from community members, selected three, then stepped into supporting roles while these community members ran the programs. “The events represented a diverse cross section of local interests: an inclusive dance party and panel discussion of accessibility issues in nightlife spaces, a gathering of local writers and poets... and a celebration of local Indian-American culture that attracted more than 400 people” (Smith, 2017).
Idea Box
At the Oak Park Public Library outside of Chicago, Illinois, “just inside the Main Library entrance, the Idea Box is a dedicated 19-by-13-foot space that is always changing...[with] collaborative community installations, library-led initiatives, and more... all designed to connect our community and inspire learning.” Exhibits have included magnet wall poetry, “Kindness notes,” and a “community tree” where users could reflect on restorative justice (n.d.).

Conclusion
David Weinberger, in 2014, wrote “The future of libraries won’t be created by libraries. That’s a good thing. The future is too big and too integral to the infrastructure of knowledge for any one group to invent it” (2014). He was looking at the state of information technology and seeing that libraries were not keeping up with the increasing ease of access to useful content. Fortunately, library discovery tools have improved in the last five years. But, this serves as a case-in-point that we in libraries will never be at the forefront of developing technology. Nor should we be. Our focus is to understand the information needs of our users and connect them with the best resources and learning experiences available.

With this user focus, we should remain aware of developments in technology so we can be open to developments that will enhance learning. When, through participatory exhibits, our users see us as attentive partners in their learning, and the library as a place for creative exploration, we will continue to have a vital place in our community. Learning through participatory experience is a proven method for establishing a strong sense of community while enhancing learning for our users.
References


*Idea Box – Oak Park Public Library.* Retrieved from https://oppl.org/use-your-library/idea-box/


Simon, N. (2014). *Opening up the museum: Nina Simon @ TEDxSantaCruz.* Retrieved from https://youtu.be/alcwlH1vZ9w

