

Poster Session

## **Connecting Graduate Students to Library Resources at the Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery**

Joanna Gadsby and Shu Qian, Reference and Instruction Librarians  
Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

### **Research Problem**

The reference department at the Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery wants to expand its services and improve outreach for graduate students, an underserved population. We currently offer services for undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty and staff at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). UMBC, a member of the university system of Maryland, offers 77 graduate degree programs and enrolled 2923 graduate students in 2009. Our statistics show that the majority of students who attend library instruction sessions are undergraduates. In 2009, only 103 graduate students attended library instruction sessions or workshops.

Outreach is traditionally one of the toughest tasks for librarians and reaching graduate students can be more difficult in practice due to the diverse needs of this user group. Compared with undergraduate students, graduate students are a more diverse group and consist of more returning students and international students who may not be aware of the library resources and services at all. Moreover, they tend to be less centrally located on campus due to their independent study patterns and the likelihood that they are commuters.

However, since the majority of graduate students have teaching or research duties, they need information about using library resources and services effectively and efficiently. Reference materials save them research time; familiarity with library resources and services can help them save time finding information. In addition, most graduate students are working on theses, dissertations and scholarly publications, all of which involve the need to manage citations and create bibliographies. Learning to use citation management software, style manuals and database kits will be significantly helpful for this group of students. Our department aims to reach out to graduate students at our institution in order to market different methods of library resources and services that may better meet their research needs.

### **Strategies to Solve the Problem**

In the spring semester of 2010, UMBC's reference department began an initiative to make our library resources and services more visible and relevant for the school's graduate students. Instead of focusing on ways to lure them to the library, we wanted to maintain a presence outside the library building to assist students where they already go. As of March, there have been 72 graduate students present in library instruction sessions, which indicate our efforts have experienced some preliminary success.

Past experience shows that our official marketing methods are not always as effective as increasing our presence at existing events, such as orientation. We have also noticed that graduate students are eager to attend library-sponsored workshops that are geared toward their needs and interests. With this in mind, our plan is to improve both our official outreach and increase our involvement in the students' lives outside the library in order to maximize our efforts.

Phase one of this plan was the creation of a specific web page for graduate students. This page, titled "Services for Graduate Students", combines information on all resources and services that will meet their academic needs. We often use this page when presenting at orientation or graduate student workshops and it has proved to be a very useful and reliable tool due to its comprehensive nature. Presently, we are also designing many new workshops based on student interests. In addition, we aim to make more contacts with graduate advisors in order to reach out to more students who spend less time on campus.

Working with the Graduate Student Association (GSA) to market library services at their popular social events and meetings has been a positive experience. In preparation for these meetings, we designed a series of attractive, postcard-sized reference flyers that publicize our workshops and the new web page for graduate students. These flyers have been put in other strategic locations on campus such as the commuter lounge.

To move our plan forward, we are designing and planning to utilize a mobile reference unit that will allow us to take our library services to other highly frequented locations on campus. This will allow us to reach students as their questions arise and simultaneously raise visibility and awareness levels for library services. In order to target graduate students specifically, we will take this roving service to events sponsored by the GSA and we also plan to use it during hours that commuting students are more likely to be on campus. At times, we will position the cart in areas that are visited heavily by graduate students such as the commuter lounge in the Commons, the University Center and academic department offices and collect statistics from users that will include location, date and time, and type of student. These data will help us determine the best times for reaching graduate students with our mobile unit.

The benefits of this initiative will be invaluable for the library and the students we serve. To measure how well we have increased awareness of library services to graduate students, we will track the participation of graduate students in our instruction program and the number of graduate students served by our mobile reference unit. Further measurement in coming years will allow us to be more certain of the validity of our results and to subject them to more rigorous statistical testing. The collection and analysis of the data will be useful in the planning and implementation of targeted and relevant programming for graduate students at this university.