“Given that life includes a boatload of disappointment, risk, discomfort, and even failure, we need to develop an ironic comfort with discomfort if we are to truly build strength and find ease. We need to make sure every setback doesn’t send us headlong into a massive fight-or-flight response. This means we need to be able to do three things. First, we need to tolerate the discomfort that comes from difficulty and challenge inherent in pursuing mastery, because mastery ultimately makes hard things easy. Second, we need to be able to cope with the discomfort inherent in our own vulnerability by becoming brave enough to follow our passion and purpose instead of the crowd. Finally, we need a plan for bouncing back when the going gets rough - which it inevitably will!”

--- Christine Carter
*The Sweet Spot*
Welcome to our session “Organizing a Series of Events for an academic library: pitfalls and silver linings.” Today we plan to talk about our experience planning an entire week full of activities at our library, what worked, what didn’t, what we wished we could have done differently, and resources for planning your own events. First, let’s introduce ourselves...
Lewis J. Ort Library @ Frostburg State University

Mission Statement

The Lewis J. Ort Library supports the mission of Frostburg State University by developing, selecting, and organizing resources appropriate to the University’s academic programs. The Library recognizes the varied information needs of its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community users, and suitably addresses those needs. The Library further promotes information literacy education for its clientele by utilizing current technology and by providing an instructional program that teaches Library users how to access, evaluate, and utilize information for research purposes.

Vision Statement

The Lewis J. Ort Library aspires to provide information resources and services that advance student-centered learning and research. It supports the University’s commitment to prepare future leaders to be critical thinkers who are information literate and technologically-competent global citizens. The Library will collaborate with partners to increase access to information resources and foster scholarly communication.

A little background about us. Lewis J. Ort library is an academic library serving around 5500 students (?). We house about half a million items including books, periodicals, audio-visual materials, maps, art prints, and act as a depository for US and Maryland government information resources. In addition, the library subscribes to more than 80 electronic databases providing access to 40,000 full-text electronic journals. We have study rooms, individual and group. Our librarians teach information literacy classes and offer individual reference consultations. Fairly standard library in the small to mid-sized category. As a group we are comprised of 8 librarians and 10 support staff. We also have about 20 student workers.
National Library Week
April 11–15, 2016
Planning Timeline

The idea for a week of events came from the desire to celebrate 40 years in our Library building. The Library had seen many incarnations on campus over the years and occupied several different buildings, but in 1976, the Library moved to its own building. The move-in date just happened to coincide with National Library Week, so I thought it would be fun to celebrate the two occasions in tandem. I knew Amber was a go-getter like myself, so I thought she’d be interested in helping plan some events. Amber was crazy enough to go along with me, so we brainstormed some ideas and pitched it to our Director, Dr. Lea Messman-Mandicott. The Director looked over our list of 17 proposal items and we discussed the feasibility of each option in terms of time, money, manpower, etc. Some of the ideas that didn’t make the cut were: Movie night, Yoga in the Stacks, Poetry Slam, Speaker, Mini-golf course, How many cards in the catalog game, and a Book domino chain.
Final Event List

- “Dress Like a Librarian” Costume Contest
- Scavenger Hunt
- National Library Workers Day Potluck Lunch for Staff
- Art Night
- Food-for Fines Day
- “I Love My Library” Interactive Display
- Photo Slideshow Display
- Formal Reception for Current and Former Library Staff

During the meeting with our Director, we decided on these activities…We chose to do one activity for our students per day, as well as some ongoing displays.
Planning Continued...

- March 1 - Meeting with any staff interested in volunteering to help with events.
- March 9 - Contacted University Publications Department to design/order a poster
- March 9 - Submitted events to online University calendar
- April 5 - Sent invitations to former staff for reception
- April 5 - Finalized Menu for Reception

Once our activities were approved by the Director, we convened a meeting with any staff that were interested in helping execute the activities. The purpose of the meeting was to, first of all, inform staff of what we had planned, ask for comment, *gentle* criticism, and solicit volunteers for each activity. We mostly needed volunteers to help with the Interactive display, as well as the digital display. The next steps in the planning process were to advertise our events. About 6 weeks before our events were slated to take place, we submitted a work order to the University Publications department to design a poster. Normally, I would recommend submitting this quite a bit sooner than 6 weeks. We were lucky that March is not the busiest time of the year, and our poster was relatively simple, so they were able to produce a poster pretty quickly. The best recommendation I can make here is to have ALL of your information ready. We typed up everything we wanted the poster to say, and they just made it pretty. Once it was designed, we submitted another work order with the PDF to the printing office to print the posters. The whole process took about 2 weeks for us. During this time we also submitted each event individually into the online University calendar, sent invitations to former staff...
for the reception, and finalized the menu.
Finally the big week arrived. On Monday morning, we set up all of the equipment for the first activity: the “I Love My Library” display. We set up the large bulletin boards, the table, and all of the supplies. One thing I want to mention is to be prepared to do everything yourself. Outside help is always a bonus. That’s what helps me keep a positive attitude about all of the work I put in.
Monday-Thursday: I Love my Library Display

- Invited students to add to a display of notes explaining why they loved the library
- To encourage students to participate we offered a prize drawing
- Dual purpose
  - Improve the approachability of the library and its staff
  - Use as an assessment tool
- Would we do it again? YES!

With an eye catching display (and candy, of course!) we lured students in to tell us what they love about our library. Each student wrote what they loved about the library on a butterfly Post-It note and pinned it to the bulletin board. The goal was to continue to fill the board all week. Something that really made a difference in the number of butterflies we received was whether or not the table was being manned, and even who was manning it! We used a combination of Faculty, staff and student employees to man the table. As may have been expected, faculty and staff were more enthusiastic about approaching students as they entered the building and asking for feedback. During the times the table was unmanned, we placed a sign on the table explaining the activity, however, we received very few responses during these times.

This activity served a dual purpose: to make the library more fun and vibrant and the staff more approachable, but also to use as an assessment tool to see what we are doing well, or where we should focus our efforts to make even better. It also shows those things that maybe aren’t as great as we thought they were. For instance, we received several comments about free printing, which we knew would be a huge hit, but we also received several comments about the awesome librarians, which not only makes us feel good, but emphasizes how important a personal connection is, and how we might want to focus on continuing building relationships with students. The students also overwhelming value the physical space of the library for study areas, both
singly and in groups. Access to physical items, like books and microfilm, is also important to the students. The library helps foster a place of inspiration where students can accomplish learning and research goals. The student community values the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff. While this event shows the Ort Library’s positive attributes, services such as orientation classes and personal research consultations were not mentioned. Non-mentioned services or products provide a window to show the Ort Library where improvements in promotion services and can be made.

To encourage participation, we had students who added to the display write their name and email address down on a piece of paper for a prize drawing. The prize was a bag of goodies like snacks and office supplies, all donated by our lovely staff. We had over 100 entries by the end of the week. For reasons we will touch on next, we ended up drawing 2 winners...
...who were both pretty excited to win! So would we do this activity again? YES!
Monday: 
**Dress Like a Librarian**

- Encouraged students to dress like Old-timey Librarians, take selfies, tag them on social media (#ILoveOrt), and compete for a prize
- Purchased a Polaroid-style photo printing device so students could print their photos and take it with them ($$$)
- Created Photobooth-style cutouts and word bubbles to create more interesting photos
- **Would we do it again? Probably Not.**

The next activity we planned was a “Dress like a librarian” costume contest. Our goal was to have students dress like Old-timey Librarians, complete with buns and sensible shoes, and tag us on social media. To encourage participation, we offered another bag of donated goodies to be awarded to the best-dressed, as judged by us. To go along with the old-fashioned theme, we purchased a Polaroid style photo printer so students could print their photo and take it with them, as well as print a copy for the library to create a photo collage of participants. As fun as this events sounded in concept, it was ruled a dud. We had only a few students take pictures with our props and zero students come dressed in old-timey attire (although the librarians thought it was a hoot!). We spent a lot of money on the photo printer for very little use. Also, the technology in using the printer with an old iPhone that kept crashing did not help our image. Would we do it again? Probably not, at least not in the way we did it.
Tuesday: Scavenger Hunt

- Set up a whiteboard at entrance with instructions for the scavenger hunt
- Offered clues for the location of each paw - facilitates learning different areas of the library
- Encouraged participation by awarding prizes for each Bobcat paw found
- Would we do it again? Yes!

On Tuesday, we set up a scavenger hunt throughout the library. Once again this was a dual purpose activity; to offer something fun and award prizes, but also to help students learn about different areas of the library. Each clue we offered pointed the students in the direction of a paw print that was hidden in the library. The clues would give a bit of information like... hold up an example. Once the pawprint was retrieved, the student could bring it back to the circulation desk for a prize. Prizes were mostly snacks donated by library staff like King size candy bars, Pop Tarts, and Cinnamon buns. Overall, the activity was a success. Of 25 pawprints hidden, about 20 were retrieved and redeemed for a prize. Would we do it again? Yes! The students seemed to enjoy it. Maybe next time we might uncomplicate it by just hiding the objects without clues. We also needed to clarify the rules with the circulation staff. For instance a student came back with more than once to retrieve a prize. This caused confusion as we hadn’t considered this scenario.
Wednesday was more of a down day, and a chance for staff to celebrate. We did not have any activities planned for the students besides the ongoing I love my library display. We hosted a potluck lunch in our staff room and just enjoyed communing with our coworkers.
On Thursday we hosted our “40 Years Under the Arches” reception. About 20 former faculty and staff attended. We enjoyed hors d’oeuvres and beverages catered by campus dining services. We also set up a monitor showing the digital display that our Digital Projects Librarian and Special Collections Librarian collaborated on. The digital display featured photos of the various incarnations of the library on campus and even students carrying books from one location to another during the moving process. The reception was a nice gathering of old friends, but it wasn’t quite as successful as we had hoped. Attendance was low for the amount of effort and money that went into planning and execution. Would we do it again? Maybe, but we’d probably make it a little less formal and invite former student employees as well. We are actually planning something like this for Homecoming next Fall.
Here are just a couple photos from the digital display.
Thursday: Art Night

- Set up a table with art supplies
  - Adult coloring pages
  - Make-your-own bookmark
  - Blackout poetry
- A relaxed activity with no incentives offered
- Attendance low
- Would we do it again? Maybe?

On Thursday Night we hosted an Art Night. We set up a table in our Technical Services area with Adult coloring pages, colored pencils, supplies to create bookmarks, and old book pages to create blackout poetry. This activity was very low cost and easy to facilitate, but was rather unsuccessful. We had about a handful of participants, probably due to many factors. We did not advertise well, we set up in a bad location, and we chose a night with the least foot traffic. I think a lot of this was due to burnout as well. We were pretty tired by Thursday. So would we do this again? Maybe - it’s not much effort and very low cost. We would probably move it to a more conspicuous area on a busier night and use our ever-popular white boards to advertise it, as well as social media.
On Friday we ran a Food for Fines promotion. This event was more of a “Thank You” to our patrons and a sort of philanthropy to the community. We had assumed that since many other libraries have great success with this kind of event, that we would too. We printed out bookmark sized fliers and stuck them in checked out materials in the couple weeks leading up to the event. On the day of the event, we used a whiteboard at the entrance to advertise that it was indeed Food for fines day. To our shock, we received absolutely zero donations of canned food items. Looking back, we probably would have had more success with this event if we had more buy-in from others in the library. If the circulation staff would have been involved from the start and allowed the opportunity to offer suggestions, they may have been more willing to talk it up to students and other patrons. We certainly could have done more advertisements on social media. So would we do it again? Maybe. If given the proper attention and planning, we could likely make this a successful event.
## In Summary...

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<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<td>• Achieved great results from the assessment event</td>
<td>• Spread ourselves too thin</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Hosted several activities with little to no budget</td>
<td>• Did not create buy-in among all staff</td>
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<td>• Improved staff morale</td>
<td>• “Wasted” money on technology that likely won’t be used again</td>
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<td>• Provided opportunity for students to see librarians in a more casual setting</td>
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So overall, we would consider the event a success. We learned a lot about hosting activities for College students. We learned from what went well like the assessment activity and the scavenger hunt, but more importantly we learned from our failures. We definitely will not invest in an expensive piece of technology that none of us has used before for an event that may or may not be a hit. We also will not try to plan so many brand new activities in such a close time frame. We probably bit off more than we can chew and did not have enough help to execute every activity to the highest level. If we had delegated one or two people to each event who could then devote their full attention to executing one event, we may have had more success for events like the Food Drive and the Costume Contest.
Resources we recommend:

- The Library as Incubator Project - [http://www.libraryasincubatorproject.org/?cat=17](http://www.libraryasincubatorproject.org/?cat=17)
- TimelineJS - [https://timeline.knightlab.com/](https://timeline.knightlab.com/)
- Pinterest - [https://www.pinterest.com/](https://www.pinterest.com/)
  - ALA Magazine
  - Central Mississippi Regional Library System
  - UFV LIBIT (University of the Frazier Valley, Abbotsford, BC)
- Canva - [https://www.canva.com/](https://www.canva.com/)
- Piktochart - [https://piktochart.com/](https://piktochart.com/)
- Ad/Lib - [http://adlib.info](http://adlib.info)
- Librarian Design Share - [https://librariandesignshare.org](https://librariandesignshare.org)
- Facebook Groups -
  - ALAThinkTank
  - Library Marketing and Outreach
  - Library Employee Support Network
Questions?

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