

# Academic BRASS

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## **Pop Up Library: Meeting Patrons Where They Are**

### **Introduction**

It is no secret that libraries have been living in a season of change and adaptation. Much has been said and will continue to be said on the changes to libraries, our services, and our roles in the academic lives of our students and faculty. So many of our services and resources exist in the digital realm that it is to be expected that students and even faculty could make use of our services without ever stepping foot in the building. In a conversation with a College of Business Administration (CoBA) faculty member, she and I contemplated these facts and their implications. Most notably, students seemed to be missing one of their most vital resources – the reference librarian. Long gone are the days when students were required to enter our library for their research. While a reference question answer was once just a few steps away from the shelves holding their information, these days their answers may be a phone call or email away. While this may require less physical effort, it does require our patrons to know that these services exist and how to contact us. This provides us with a real marketing challenge. At Nicholls State University we do offer reference services through email and over the phone in addition to the traditional “librarian at the desk” model, though our phone and email services are underutilized. A decrease in reference questions is not unique to Nicholls State, and I began to wonder if visibility is our problem. My faculty member mentioned in our conversation her love of the bookmobile in public libraries. Wondering if this was a possible solution for our visibility problem, I immediately began to envision something similar for our campus.

### **What It Is**

Pop Up Library can best be described as a temporary library in a new and different place. Pop Up Library is more than a table with some handouts -- though it may include both a table and handouts! Pop Up Library incorporates as many library services as possible that would benefit the targeted population while marketing other services not possible outside the building or that may be beneficial at other times. My Pop Up Library almost always includes reference and circulation services through the use of an app on my smartphone provided by our ILS. The idea is to *meet patrons at their point of need* rather than waiting for them at the reference desk.

Each Pop Up has a theme that the target population would find useful or interesting. Pop Up Library was first piloted in the CoBA during spring 2015 with themes that included “everything the library does that *isn't* books” to “reference librarians as superheroes” (complete with our superpowers and alter egos) to “how to do research without getting out of bed.” At Pop Up Library I provide reference services, circulate books and eBooks chosen carefully with the target population in mind, demonstrate databases and subject guides, and remind students and faculty of all the ways to get reference services.

## Results

Pop Up Library has been wildly successful, leading me to expand the event to places outside the CoBA. In the spring and fall of 2016 I have popped up at the CoBA 4 times, the student recreational center, Career Day, and a meeting of the student chapter of the Society for Human Resources Management. Over the 2 semesters I have had 18 hours of Pop Up Library with the following statistics:

- 157 conversations with students or faculty about specific resources the library can offer them.
- 15 books checked out.
- 3 eBooks downloaded.
- 4 complex reference questions answered.
- 29 general questions answered.

In a typical week, I sit at the reference desk for 14 hours, where I have far fewer interactions with our patrons. Additionally, the initiative has been noticed by faculty and has led to more collaboration with them on future pop ups as well as a better presence in their classes.

## Tips for Success

Here are some tips to help make your Pop Up Library successful:

- Be engaging and outgoing. Do not sit behind the table, waiting for someone to walk up. Offer everyone that passes a piece of candy or some other item and be surprised at how many people actually stop to talk to you!
- Make every Pop Up Library intentional and focused. Research the best times to pop up in a location. My CoBA pop ups and rec center pop ups happen at very different times of the day because heavy traffic occurs at different times. Ask yourself what the people you'll see at that location will be thinking about and be prepared to promote resources that are relevant. At CoBA, I bring the newest books and eBooks in business fields. At the rec center, I brought books and eBooks on healthy eating and exercise. At Career Day, I brought books and eBooks on resumes and networking and promoted our databases and subject guides on these topics.
- Clear your Pop Up Library with the people that run the building you are looking to pop up in. They can possibly provide resources (like a table) so you don't have to bring one yourself and suggest high traffic times.
- Track your activities. A simple spreadsheet for tick marks will go a long way in helping you determine how productive you are being with your time.
- Don't worry about marketing! A well-researched time and location will guarantee you have visitors.