PROMOTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ACADEMIC LIBRARY OUTREACH PROGRAMS

GOAL AND CONTEXT:
At James Madison University, civic engagement is one of three key components of the university’s vision. The libraries at JMU therefore try to support and promote civic engagement through our outreach to the campus and community.

We wanted to learn more about how other libraries in our state promote civic engagement. We were also interested in exploring the connections among civic literacy, information literacy, and library outreach.

METHODS:
Compiled a list of all 38 universities and colleges in Virginia.

Emailed IRB-approved survey to each library’s outreach manager or similar position (or, if no such position existed, to a library director, dean, or associate dean).

14 respondents (37% response rate) completed the web-based survey.

Summarized quantitative data in bar charts. Examined qualitative data (answers to open-ended questions) for themes.

RESULTS:
12 out of the 14 academic libraries have interest or have participated in hosting civic engagement events.

The lack of resources and library space has been a recurring problem.

Partly because of these challenges, most of the libraries surveyed have collaborated with other school-sponsored civic organizations, or permitted these groups to use library space, to help engage with their patrons.

Notable challenges our surveyed libraries faced were associating civic engagement with their library and deep partisanship among their patrons.

Virginia Academic Libraries’ Activities to Promote Civic Engagement (CE) Among Their Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designed exhibits or displays on issues related to CE</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted programming, such as a speaker or panel, related to CE</td>
<td>Not known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitated discussion on issues of public civic interest</td>
<td>Not known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offered space for voter registration drives</td>
<td>Not known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Used CE topics as an activity or example in class, assignments, information literacy workshops, or instruction sessions</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted events in which people can participate in citizen engagement, such as fine art exhibitions, community service projects, or voter registration drives</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosted or sponsored events related to CE</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included programming or hosting CE in strength plan or organizational plan</td>
<td>Not known</td>
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</tbody>
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JMU LIBRARIES’ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS PICTURED ABOVE:
- Constitutional Jeopardy game in library lobbies
- Panel discussion on the media & civic engagement
- Book display featuring works by and about immigrants and refugees
- “What is Civic Engagement?” white board
- Table for students to send a valentine to their elected representatives
- “Drawing on the left: Ben Shahn and the Art of Human Rights” art exhibit, which was featured during an event on art, activism, and civic engagement

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