

Math Branding in a Community College Library

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As a strategy to promote the Arapahoe Community College Library's collections and services, the Library undertook to brand itself as a math resource center. In promoting one area of expertise, math was selected to help address the problem of a large portion of high school graduates' inability to work at college-level math. A "Math Saturday" program at the college was organized, highlighted by a keynote presentation by a national authority on overcoming "math anxiety." The effort was successful in terms of program attendance, and in establishing ties with other agencies and groups to provide additional math programs.

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The Arapahoe Community College Library has the largest materials budget of the 13 community colleges in Colorado, serves the faculty needs and spends money wisely. Recent difficult times in Colorado state budgets created cuts to many academic libraries' materials budgets, but not at ACC. So, why did we feel a need to brand ourselves?

It was about two years ago that the ACC Library began to discuss the issue of branding. Branding was considered a natural step to take on the more competitive information environment created by the Internet and highly successful search engines. Our goal was to raise awareness of our services and demonstrate a focused set of services for all to see.

Branding has been successfully done by companies such as Apple Computer and Starbucks—so why not libraries too? It stands to reason that libraries would do well to invest in one area of expertise and promote it to their service populations.

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A branding effort is not a logo, identity or product. It is the gut feeling people have about a library and includes both positive and negative values. Branding entails steps taken by the library to generate a specific view concerning its services.

While “math” is our branding topic, we considered other areas. ACC Library has a wonderful law collection and, at several staff meetings, branding our law services was discussed. However, it was ultimately decided that our messages would run into negatives such as the possible practicing of law.

Math was considered for a number of reasons. The Math Department at ACC is the largest one with nearly one third of our students taking math classes. Forty percent of Colorado high school graduates cannot work at college level math, while in other states the figure is as high as 90 percent in some school districts.

Recently the ACC Math Department was discarding desk copies of textbooks. One of the housekeeping staff told us about math books sitting in the hallway and we inherited about 45 textbooks for our collection.

At a Library staff meeting, there was agreement that we should work on our becoming a “math resource center.” In many ways we didn’t know what a math resource center meant. Yes, we could acquire more books, DVDs, videos and other teaching aids. We already had a number of video titles for the remedial courses on reserve.

We talked with the chair of the Math Department, who was very supportive of our intended efforts. We talked with the College’s Student Success Center that does tutoring and found the person in charge of math tutoring very supportive. We didn’t want to be viewed as a competing service but a supportive math team player in this effort.

We became more familiar with the math curriculum at the college. We talked with individuals about the math problems being faced by students. Searching the Internet revealed a plethora of math websites with varying degrees of quality. We also learned about the websites that our Math Department used the most. Our public services librarian requested statistics from our institutional research office showing numbers of math students and their success rates in specific classes. The word was getting out that ACC Library was working on math resources. However, our mandate is to support the entire college.

An e-mail was sent to the deans of all four schools that basically said we are branding our math effort, but all departments are equally important to us. We explained that only a small portion of our current budget would be used specifically to upgrade the math collection. A problem would be seen as short changing others by spending too much on one subject.

In our Library’s newsletter we announced our efforts to brand in the area of math. In that article, we promoted our “math study hall” on Friday afternoons. The study hall was not very successful in terms of attendance. A year later, the Student Success Center requested the use of the same room to

offer “Midday Math.” The two remedial courses offered at the College were the focus and paid tutors were available to students. That effort has been much more successful than our study hall.

In January of 2009, a “Math Saturday” was announced in the Library’s newsletter. Math Saturday was listed for a day in April. However, by March, no keynote speaker had been found in spite of the fact \$200 was being offered. In turning down our invitation to participate, ACC’s psychology faculty did not feel they had expertise in the area. The math faculty working with us provided the name of the regional coordinator for the state’s math association. They did not answer our e-mails. Various university and college math departments had been solicited for speakers to no avail. The library director was literally losing sleep due to this problem.

Finally, with six weeks before the event, it was decided to postpone Math Saturday until October. A new online K-12 school was partnering with the Library for the Math Saturday and asked if they could hold a Math Extravaganza on the April date at ACC. We held it, and the Extravaganza had about 55 students, parents and teachers attend, with K-6th grade families being most represented.

Math activities were organized by teachers and a highlight of the event was two campus police officers in full uniform telling the youngest kids how math is used in police work. It was very apparent that the five teachers attending the event loved the face-to-face contact with students.

Ultimately a speaker was found for the October Math Saturday: Dr. Cynthia Arem, chair of social sciences at Pima Community College, Arizona, and author of *Conquering Math Anxiety*. The keynote presentation by Dr. Arem, given in the College auditorium, was entitled “Math Anxiety: Causes and Cures.”

The College’s marketing department assisted in publicizing the program, consisting of mailings to our list of media contacts.

By the program date, we had a list of 61 attendee names and phone numbers. We also invited local tutoring services to participate in the event. The services were happy to come and set up tables. We had four tutoring sites represented.

The cost of the October event included travel for the keynote speaker, publicity and staff time. The honorarium was \$500 with travel being another \$150, and hotel room cost \$108. The fliers cost \$175. We considered placing ads in the local papers, but the cost would have been another thousand dollars and we decided to forgo that expense.

A sign-up sheet was placed at the Library’s Circulation Desk to accept RSVP calls. About four weeks before the event, a few people had called, then interest picked up and our list grew to over 61 people. While there were more female attendees than male, the number of females was not as large as expected. We had more adult participants than newly-graduated high school students.

Dr. Arem, author of *Conquering Math Anxiety*, gave a well-received presentation and kept the audience engaged. Topics covered included examining your math history, math anxiety process, developing positive attitudes, changing negative beliefs to positive ones, and effective math study skills. Dr. Arem provided tips for problem solving, and had the audience practice breathing and visualization skills to reduce anxiety.

Following Dr. Arem's talk, a number of audience members stayed to visit with her. Dr. Arem had brought five copies of her book and sold all five. Among other things, she explained how Math Anxiety is a one credit non-transfer class at Pima.

At ACC contact has been made with the College's community education department to offer a non-credit class on math anxiety and the former director of institutional research at the College is interested in teaching this topic. ACC will request a copy of the curriculum from Dr. Arem's community college and explore offering the same class at ACC.

As a result of our Math Saturday efforts, the program director for online schools with the Colorado Department of Education contacted us about doing a math meeting in the future. We said we'd host the event. It also became apparent the professional development activities for teachers is a school district decision and fairly structured. We plan to contact some of the school districts and see if we can partner with them in offering professional education for teachers in math.

In conclusion, the effort to bring math more to the public forefront has proven to be beneficial to Library staff, students, faculty and the broader community, while at the same time enhancing the Library's branding position as a math resource for the College and community.

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