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Author Interviews Panel: Faculty Involvement via Self-Promotion

Brad Ost

Information & Research Services Unit, AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library, bost@auctr.edu

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**Author Interviews Panel:
Faculty Involvement via Self-Promotion
by
Brad Ost, Atlanta University Center**

Introduction

Academic librarians are constantly in search of ways to draw faculty into a more involved relationship with the library. Robert W. Woodruff Library, AUC (RWWL, AUC) librarians are no different in this regard. Many a casual and formal setting has been devoted to this effort. The link is obvious. If we can get the faculty interested in and integrated with the library we will in turn get their students interested and integrated with the library. The stumbling block, as often as not, is a matter of priorities. Faculty have all matter of commitments pulling at them. Committee attendance, assignment grading, classroom time, professional development,

and research are only a few of their pressing concerns. How to make a library event rise to the top of that ever growing list is akin to the search for the Holy Grail. This paper will discuss RWWL, AUC's own search for that Holy Grail and our successful outcome.

Concept

The idea began as a conversation over the dinner table with Chris Benda, Theological Librarian at Vanderbilt Divinity Library. We, along with several others, were attending the 2010 Wabash Center Teaching and Learning Colloquy on the Role of Theological School Librarians. Chris was explaining how he was interviewing faculty members and putting those interviews online. That germ of an idea stayed dormant until the summer of 2011 when the liaison librarians at Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center were in a staff meeting discussing ways to get faculty members involved with the Library. Three memories came together at the same time; we had at least one Flip camera, we had a YouTube account, and the conversation with Chris Benda. A proposal was born.

Implementation

RWWL, AUC is very supportive of fresh ideas for faculty involvement. So I was encouraged to start on this idea immediately. I enrolled the assistance of another reference librarian, Daniel Le, and we began to brainstorm about what we wanted to do in our videos.

We wanted to establish the soft aspects of the project. What would the criteria be for participating, what questions would be asked, and how would we showcase the finished video?

First, participation would be both broad and exclusive. While we wanted to involve any AUC faculty, staff, and students, we knew there were some realities that would limit the selection. We wanted someone who had published (we expanded this later to anyone who had also created or presented) within the last two years. As well, not wishing to be flooded with requests (we were very optimistic), we limited ourselves to those whom we approached personally. We didn't send out a spam e-mail. Rather we asked our librarians to approach members in their discipline area who had published recently and who they thought would give a good interview.

Secondly, we had to decide on a name and a set of questions to be asked. The name we decided upon came to be, in hindsight, recognized as somewhat short-sighted and cumbersome. AUC Authors Series does not roll off the tongue, and neither does it reflect the true intent of the project, which is to interview the entire creative community no matter what medium is used. But after several Academic Alert e-mails, articles, and the creation of a LibGuide we realized we were stuck with the awkward brand. The questions ended up being a more successful effort. We wanted to make sure we pointed the viewer toward the library so we included at least one question that was directly related to library use. These were the 5 basic questions we decided to use in every interview:

- Will you give us an overview of your latest work?
- What caused you to choose this topic?
- Some in our audience might be thinking about writing a book but are a bit intimidated about starting. Could you give them 1 or 2 ideas to help them begin that process?
- Do you have another project coming up?
- Were you able to use the library to help you with the research for this work?

The intent was to incorporate additional questions which arose from the responses to the first two. We would then end the interview with questions three through five. This format has worked well through the interviews to date. But this incorporation has added to a proposed fifteen-minute time limit. While none have proved to be boring we were often motivated, through the combination of an interesting topic and a compelling interviewee, to extend some interviews long beyond that constraint.

Thirdly, and finally, we decided to create a LibGuide where we would showcase the videos. Woodruff Library librarians have invested much time in making LibGuides, a Springshare product (<http://www.springshare.com/>), a useful and frequented resource for their patrons. So it was natural that the videos would find a home there. The AUC Authors Series LibGuide (<http://research.auctr.edu/aucauthors>) would include the videos themselves, the faces of the interviewees, and some indication of what they would be speaking about.

Technical Aspects

We quickly assessed our hardware and software and realized we needed some help. We had a Flip camera (we actually had two and began to use the additional one on the second interview), and the Camtasia software for editing. But that was all we had. To add to our need the batteries in the Flip camera were not recharging. With my own funds I went out and bought rechargeable batteries, a charger, and several tripods to which the Flip camera could be affixed. We were ready for our first interview.

We asked a dynamic professor, Dr. L.H. Whelchel from the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, to be our first interview. My 11 x 12 office was chosen as the location for the interviews. We definitely wanted a physical connection with the library so from the beginning we asked that faculty come to the library. With the Flip camera on the tripod at one end of the office and Professor Whelchel and me in two chairs facing each other at the other end we began the interview. Dan Le turned on the camera, made sure we were all in the shot and focused, and acted as our director. I (Brad Ost) conducted the interview.

We had approximately thirty minutes of video to work with once the filming was done. We already were using Camtasia at the library to edit short tutorials so we started editing the videos in the same software. Editing of the first video was not too difficult since we only had one camera. But there still was a learning curve as we had to figure out how to best work with the audio levels, transitions, callouts, and zoom and pan functions. A picture with the RWWL, AUC logo was introduced in the beginning of the video as was a picture of the featured book. We had not yet added sound other than the voices of the participants. The finished video came in at a little over twenty-seven minutes. Since YouTube only allows a maximum of fifteen minutes per uploaded video we cut the video in two, rendered both halves and uploaded them to our YouTube account. In YouTube those two videos were recombined into a playlist.

Now that the video was completed and secure in YouTube we created a LibGuide to present them in. At the AUC Authors Series LibGuide, we created a home tab and one tab for each of the schools represented in the AUC community. On the home page we decided to present pictures of each interviewee with a small introduction of name and work being discussed. However, finding the appropriate box took some thought. We decided upon the rich text box and then searched for HTML code that would give us the accordion effect we

were looking for. We wanted to try and duplicate the listing of interviews displayed on this Frontline page. (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/view/>). Ultimately HTML didn't seem adequate for the task. JavaScript seemed to be a possible alternative. We then went to the web to find the coding which we felt was too advanced for our talents. The JQuery site (<http://jqueryui.com/>) seemed to offer our best solution while also providing a place our IT people felt was safe from malicious hacking. On the pages representing the different schools we used a multimedia — embedded media and widgets box — and embedded the YouTube code in order to present the video interview. Next to each multimedia box we placed a smaller Rich Text box showcasing an image of the author's specific work featured in the interview.¹ We went public with the LibGuide in September of 2011 and it soon became the fastest growing LibGuide in our collection, collecting over 1,500 hits by the end of the year.

Lessons Learned

The effort to develop the Authors Series and make it a viable source for information and promotion has not been without its lessons.

- We started with too narrow a scope. We had started with the idea of interviewing authors of books. We began the process, created the LibGuide, and started posting before we realized that there was a creative community comprised of much more than authors. Artists of every stripe began to approach us and we quickly realized that while we were already branded it would have been better not to have limited to the title of the series to "Authors." We have thought about rebranding but are waiting for the initiation of our new stage, see more in the "Moving Forward" section below, to decide about creating a new name for the project and LibGuide.
- Camtasia was the resource we had available so we used it. It was the software package we used to create small tutorials and it performed that function very well. But it soon became clear that this was not a good platform for larger projects. Memory caching was a constant problem, slowing production down markedly. We were limited in the types of effects we could produce with the package. We had Final Cut Pro on several public machines and saw a stark difference between those two pieces of software. To try and overcome this deficiency we have tendered a proposal for new equipment and software. Among the requests are licenses for Final Cut Pro. This software would be placed on our office machines where the editing is accomplished. In the meantime we will continue to use Camtasia.
- While servers are most secure with their back-up capabilities, they made the editing process drudgery. Every back-up required quite a delay which in turn delayed output. Eventually we risked catastrophic PC failure and kept the videos on our office computers. The increase in speed and rendering made it a decision we were willing to live with.
- While this is a great idea and still very popular with faculty we felt early on that we needed to expand the impact and academic usefulness of this project. We did not want to find ourselves at the end of the project's run of popularity without a viable use for continued interviews. We felt sure that while self promotion would draw people in it would not likely keep them coming back for more. More about our solution to this below in "Moving Forward."

- It was hard to get help within the library. It wasn't that no one wanted to help. Rather, we had specialized ourselves out of the present capabilities of some of our colleagues. While most had done tutorial editing of one kind or another the more extensive video editing required, to gain a comfort level, a trial and error period that most did not have time for. Between my co-producer, Dan Le, and myself we were often editing over sixteen hours a week. We didn't really solve this problem. But as we have helped others with their video projects we hope we are creating a comfort level that will develop a new group of available editors.

Moving Forward

Although we have been conducting these interviews for less than a year we recognize that we need to keep expanding our horizons. With that in mind we took some time to consider different ways to use our interviews.² We were guided in our thinking by the idea that we wanted to continue to involve the library in the work the faculty was doing. The next logical step seemed to be to move the interview series into the classroom.

One interview seemed very suited to such an effort. Dr. James Gillam, professor of History at Spelman College, had participated in an extraordinary interview where he discussed his book *Life and Death in the Central Highlands: An American Sergeant in the Vietnam War, 1968-1970*.³ During the academic year he also leads a seminar on the Vietnam War. This confluence of the book and class seemed the perfect vehicle for moving our interviews into the classroom.

We presented Dr. Gillam with our proposal. We would edit his interview into individual question and answer segments. We would then take these discrete segments and logically attach them to lectures from his syllabus, which address the same topic. We would then create a LibGuide which would be tabbed according to each specific lecture. These tabs, which can be hidden, would all appear at the same time or only be revealed the week of the lecture. Upon Dr. Gillam's direction the students would be sent every week to the LibGuide to listen to extra-lecture material which then could be put into homework or test questions. By doing this Dr. Gillam could add extra material to his class without having to take up valuable class time. Dr. Gillam told us to go ahead with our plan.

We are working on this project now. To extend this idea we are changing the construction of our introductory letter to possible interviewees. We will reveal the five basic questions. But we will also suggest that they come prepared with their own questions which can be used in a classroom setting such as the one being arranged for Dr. Gillam.

Conclusion

This is the best project I've started on a shoestring. With really nothing more than a Flip camera and the Camtasia software already installed on our computers we were able to develop a project that drew faculty into the library. While we are working toward a better presentation with better equipment, this initial run of seventeen interviews is a testimony to the effective ways that library staff can reach out to their faculty counterparts.

Endnotes

¹ Users are allowed to use book images based upon the agreement spelled out in Springshare's documentation.

"LibGuides offers two services for adding the cover art: Syndetics and Amazon. Between these two services, you should be able to add cover art for most books.

- ♦ The Syndetics cover art service is available for all LibGuides customers, whether you subscribe to their service or not — the licensing is through LibGuides. A partnership we're *very* excited about. :)
- ♦ If you use the Amazon service, the cover art will be linked to Amazon, not your catalog. We utilize Amazon's API to provide these images; however, their terms of use require that the cover art link to Amazon, so we cannot change it."

Springshare, "L C Guide FAQ," Springshare, <http://guidefaq.com/a.php?qid=4831> (accessed July, 2, 2012).

² Dan Le has moved on to Public Library pastures and his co-producer spot has been filled by Roylec Cummings.

³ Gillam, James. *Life and Death in the Central Highlands: An American Sergeant in the Vietnam War, 1968-1970*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2010.



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