

21 years. 21 Stories. Creating a Community of Giving at the IUPUI University Library

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Abstract

This article describes goals and strategies for a library communications and fundraising program designed to mark a milestone anniversary. The authors report on a targeted public relations effort to enhance fundraising results and review development outcomes in the context of current literature related to donor loyalty and fundraising for libraries. Particular emphasis is placed on the value of creating compelling stories about the individuals who shape the life of the library and its ability to impact the wider community, especially donors whose gifts facilitate unique programs and collections. This approach aligns with considerations identified in both fundraising and library literature, which underscore the effectiveness of utilizing story to deepen connections with and motivate donors.

Keywords: fundraising, academic libraries, public relations, donors.

Organizational Overview

The University Library is central to the mission of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), a top ranked urban university, recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for its achievements, including top-ranked programs in nursing, public and environmental affairs, business and law. With staff and resources that support all of IUPUI's more than 30,000 students, across more than 250 degree programs, the IUPUI University Library is a vital partner for the IUPUI campus and the Indianapolis community. Due to limited financial and personnel resources, the University Library does not engage in a formal marketing program. The University Library Campus Outreach Group (COG), made up of a mix of librarians and staff helps to promote resources and services to IUPUI students, faculty and staff. The library's external relations staff, which consists of two full-time employees and one part-time student, focuses entirely on development and public relations activities that complement a well-rounded fundraising program, seeking to grow the library's donor base and increase the number of prospects with a capacity to make major gifts.

A Milestone Opportunity

In 2014 the University Library launched parallel communications and fundraising campaigns in recognition of the 21st anniversary of its landmark building, designed by renowned architect Edward Larrabee Barnes. These campaigns were

designed to expand the library's donor base by 1) reconnecting with past and lapsed donors, 2) identifying new prospects, and 3) communicating shared accomplishments with current donors. Drawing on strategies to foster donor loyalty, we released *21 Stories* over the course of 2014 via various formats, including video, print, electronic communications and social media. During the fall semester, we also hosted what we called a "flash cake" event to help celebrate the library's 21st birthday with the students. The culmination of the parallel campaigns was a celebratory anniversary reception attended by donors, community partners and IUPUI faculty and staff. At the anniversary event, every guest received a passport with customized stickers that allowed them to interact with each one of the *21 Stories* in the form of videos, photographs, virtual slideshows, and a live presentation. The full array of *21 Stories* were captured on a web page (www.ulib.iupui.edu/21st), which evolved over the course of the library's anniversary year.

Outcomes in Context

A two-channel approach to outreach enabled the IUPUI University Library to successfully achieve increases in the number of donors, the number of gifts, as well as the size of the average gift in 2014. Research has shown that a donor's commitment is determined by the extent to which they share an organization's values (Sargeant, 2007). In order to retain donors, organizations must find ways to, "deepen the bonds that exist between them and their supporters," (Sargeant, 2001). The various narratives that made up the *21 Stories* communications campaign, many of which featured individual and corporate donors, allowed the IUPUI University Library to showcase its mission and values, and to demonstrate two decades of accomplishments made possible through donors' support. Perhaps most importantly, the library was able to expand its donor base overall, which with proper stewardship, offers significant opportunities for growth of the development program going forward.

Pertinent Themes in Current Library and Fundraising Literature

Fostering Donor Loyalty Through Strategic Communication

In a review of fundraising for large public university libraries, Dewey insists that, "a major imperative for library fund-raising success and sustainability is expansion of the donor base,"

(2006). With a goal of expanding IUPUI's University Library donor base and increasing the potential for major giving, development staff envisioned and implemented a strategy addressing specific fundraising challenges observed in practice, as well as current research, and by sharing stories about the library's needs and accomplishments. The plan centered on the 21st anniversary of the library's building, and became a reality through public support, as well as private philanthropy.

In the larger context of higher education fundraising, libraries can be challenged to retain donors and to identify new donor prospects. Dewey observes, "The library does not follow a traditional alumni-based model, and there can be resistance to paving the way for the library to try different constituencies to expand their donor base," (2006). Unlike academic programs and schools which confer degrees, libraries cannot claim their own alumni and are obliged to compete with other giving opportunities on campus. Dewey warns against giving into the myth that, "libraries have no natural constituency," however and suggests focusing on the many ways students, faculty and the public benefit from academic libraries' resources and expertise. Dewey urges, "Library directors and fund-raisers need to break through these myths with sound and compelling stories about what constitutes a research library, how it is unique and how it benefits students," (2006). The University Library's 21st anniversary campaign encompassed 21 unique stories designed to illustrate each of these three key points.

The IUPUI University Library is open to the public. Any Indiana resident with valid identification is eligible for a borrower's card. Of the more than 800,000 visitors to the library each year, 10 percent are from the community. These include local high school students, as well as users from a nearby community college. Openness to the wider community creates opportunities for fundraising. A review of recent IUPUI annual fundraising results show that year to year, anywhere from 40-60 percent of donors to the University Library are not alumni. In 2014, 76.7 percent of donors were non-alumni or friends. Only 8.2 percent of donors were alumni. While positioning an academic library as a local non-profit service provider opens up potentially productive development possibilities, it also requires a thoughtful communications approach that distinguishes it from other community-based non-profits.

The continued growth of the non-profit sector gives donors more options. *The New York Times* reported on a study by the Urban Institute that showed, "from 2001 to 2011, the number of non-profits in the United States grew 25 percent while the number of for-profit businesses rose by half of one percent," (Bernasek, 2014). In order to attract new prospects and retain existing donors, libraries must invest time and money to craft and disseminate a compelling case for support. In a difficult economy, when donors often refocus on urgently needed social services, this can be especially difficult. In a study of donor loyalty, Sargeant finds that, "although approximately one in five donors might lapse because of a change in financial circumstances, a similar number simply elect to switch

their support to other organizations," (2001). Sargeant's study showed that 26 percent of donors changed their donating pattern because they perceived other causes to be more deserving. Sargeant identifies responsiveness, feedback and the perceived effectiveness of the organization as important factors influencing donor longevity. In a later study with Woodliffe, Sargeant adds shared beliefs, the existence of a personal connection to the organization, as well as trust and perceived risk to the previously identified service-quality considerations that motivate donors (2007). By featuring stories about individual and corporate donors, as well as librarians, faculty and students, the University Library's *21 Stories* campaign was tailored to respond to many of the factors above, demonstrating to past supporters what the library has accomplished with their help and highlighting the people whose academic experiences were impacted through philanthropic gifts at all levels. All of the above concerns underline the importance of creating a sense of story in library donor communications. Library needs should be represented as a constellation of narratives adding up to a meaningful enterprise that donors want to be a part of and support.

A strong theme in the library's *21 Stories* campaign was community engagement, an integral principle of learning overall at IUPUI. The university library provides not only learning space and service desk consultations to the public, it offers unique collections, both archival and digital, many of which illustrate important aspects of local history and culture. In a descriptive analysis of public relations in academic libraries, Marshall observes that, "service to the community is a very important public relations tool whether recognized as such or not. The libraries are accepted as part of the larger community and act as a bridge between the community and the college university campus," (2001). Positioned in the heart of an urban research university, the IUPUI University Library plays an important role in the wider community, not just by facilitating life-long learning for its citizens, but by preserving and creating access to materials that reflect the city's identity.

Another key message in the *21 Stories* campaign was the importance of technology in the library environment. Focusing on new technologies and how they impact library services, positions the library as an innovator. Danneker explores the funding challenges that the rapid growth of information technology presents for academic libraries, noting, "as technology has allowed much of academic work to be completed online, and as the information available on various Internet sources has become increasingly prevalent, university administrators have questioned the importance of the library and its role as the keeper of and gateway to relevant information in the current academic environment," (2011). Danneker's suggestion that academic libraries strive to demonstrate their value to both internal and external audiences is apt.

The University Library considers internal constituents, such as administrators and the IUPUI scholarly community, to be key audiences for its communications. The *21 Stories* campaign

highlighted initiatives that enhance the campus research environment and characterize the campus as focused on the future. Looking at donor relations as public relations, Wedge-worth asserts that, “fundraising goals should convey a vision or a sense of how the institution pictures itself in the future. They should be compelling enough to generate excitement about what the future will be,” (2000). As the role of libraries continues to evolve in the face of technological change, it becomes increasingly important to help both internal and external constituents see beyond outdated perceptions and understand the ways contemporary academic libraries help users imagine and prepare for the future; through the provision of electronic resources, the creation of unique digital collections, plus instruction and advocacy related to new technologies that support learning and research.

The Communication Plan Overview

The IUPUI University Library has been in its current building for 21 years. Librarians and staff have seen a lot of change over the years as the role of libraries has shifted. Instead of celebrating the 20th anniversary, the development team decided to celebrate the library’s 21st anniversary. When people reflect on their time spent in college they often think of how much they grew during that time. This theme, coming of age, is where we drew our inspiration for celebrating our 21st anniversary year. The two primary goals for the *21 Stories* campaign were expanding our overall donor base and growing the library’s Student Opportunity Fund. Parallel with fundraising efforts in our anniversary year, the library launched its *21 Stories* campaign designed to do three things: reconnect with past and lapsed donors, identify new prospects, and communicate shared accomplishments with current donors. Although there were pieces of this campaign that directly solicited donors, we also wanted to improve our donor communications. Having a communication plan is vital to a successful fundraising campaign. In particular we strategically used web communications to reinforce print pieces and individual conversations with donors. Waters describes e-communications as a good place to start with new donors, “Following up the donations with additional communication, such as Internet or traditional mailings of newsletters, leads to increased likelihood that the donor will give again,” (2007).

We intended for the anniversary to be more than just a one night event. Developing 21 unique stories to be shared over the course of the year leading up to the anniversary event in October 2014, allowed for many different points of contact with our constituents.

Donors at all levels appreciate communications and examples of how their gift is helping the organization fulfill its mission (Waters, 2008).

The IUPUI University Library is a public academic library, which provides us with a connection to the Indianapolis community that other university libraries may not have. The library is not only the heart of the IUPUI campus but it’s a

great connector to the greater Indianapolis community. Community members choose to support the library as it has a wide reach and has a direct impact on student success. Our Center for Digital Scholarship helps preserve Indianapolis history which is something that many community members value as well.

In order to employ a comprehensive strategy, we pulled a list of anyone who had donated to the library since 1993 (as far back as our database would allow) and folded these people into our communication plans. New prospects were found through first time donors in the past year and community patrons who had obtained a library card. In order to ensure longevity of an organization, development staff must continue to find new donors and community friends (Waters, 2008).

As the IUPUI community continues to grow, we feel the need to continue to provide unique learning experiences for our students. In order to do this we need external support. During the *21 Stories* campaign we promoted our Student Opportunity Fund. This fund is designed to help students grow and succeed at IUPUI through programs that enhance the services and activities of the University Library. With support, the library can help students successfully complete their academic degrees and develop skills that will lead to lifelong learning and community engagement. The annual atrium sculpture competition, which gives art students real world experience creating a commissioned art piece, the Diversity Scholars program, which gives one student a yearlong position developing library diversity projects and events, and professional development for our student employees are the main activities that this fund supports. This giving opportunity is a key for us because it is an ongoing need and an evergreen giving opportunity, as compared to short-term renovation or capital projects, which have been a focal point of fundraising in the past.

Implementation

The *21 Stories* campaign was created to show how far we have come and where we want to go in the future. Each story was selected to fulfill one of these areas. See Appendix for story matrix.

Sharing of the *21 Stories* campaign happened over the course of 2014 through various formats. We released the stories starting with story number 21 and ending with story number one in order to give a countdown aspect to the campaign. Many of the stories were sent via e-mail to our mailing list of more than 2,500 recipients. The e-mails included photos and teasers to the story as well as a link to the *21 Stories* Website. For three of the stories, numbers 17, 8, and 1, we created short videos. The videos provided a different medium to which our constituents responded favorably. The video for story number 1 was released the night of the event during a live presentation. Two of the stories were recorded audio pieces in the style of StoryCorps, an oral history project by National Public Radio archived at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. These were stories numbers 16 and 14. The people

featured in the stories interviewed each other, which reflected a warm and engaging rapport. Stories number 11 and 6 were highlighted in our quarterly electronic newsletter, sent to both internal campus leadership and external continuities. Finally, two of the stories were used as save-the-date postcards for the event. Many of the stories were also shared on our Face-Book page and our Twitter account, two vehicles we use to reach out to students--our primary social media audience.

Figure 1: Annual Report, Save-the-date, and the Passport.

All of the stories were also featured in our 2013-2014 annual report, which was mailed to almost 900 households. Our annual report allows us to connect with our donors and tell the stories we do not normally get to share. This print piece was also used to promote the anniversary event.



Figure 2: 2013-2014 Annual Report.

At the anniversary event on October 11, 2014 every story was featured in some unique way. We created a passport for the guests to locate all 21 stories throughout the library. Once they found and experienced a story, a sticker was provided for guests to place in their passports, allowing attendees to interact with the stories. Some stories were videos, others photographs or slideshows. Still others

were exhibits. Some were even people whose name tags indicated what number story they represented. Guests took home two keepsakes, a completed passport of their own making and an anniversary Mason jar mug.

Figure 3 and 4: Passport from the event.



Figure 5: Mason jar mug and Passport.

The *21 Stories* campaign's primary focus was on donors and community members, however students helped celebrate, too. In the spirit of flash mob events, we hosted what we called a "flash cake" event for students during the fall semester. We provided sheet cake for students to help them feel a part of our celebration. On the day of the "flash cake" event we promoted free cake in the library on our social media pages. All of the cake was gone within an hour and our students appreciated being included in our anniversary activities.

For this campaign, we wanted to create an online space to capture all the stories and share information about the event. The Website (www.ulib.iupui.edu/21st) was updated each time a story was released. We promoted the Website as the location to view the full constellation of stories in their entirety.

Since this campaign had so many different parts to it, creating unity among all of them was vital. We did this by creating a 21st anniversary logo, color scheme, selected fonts, and a tag line. These items were used with every communication as well as at the event. The tag line was "We have stories left to write," a phrase that referred not only to the library but to donors, whose support makes many of the library's programs and priorities possible. Waters states that communication strategies need to incorporate more two-way vehicles (2007). The tag line was intended to evoke library memories on the part of individual donors and also to point towards a shared future. As a result of the *21 Stories* campaign, we were sent a number of nostalgic library stories. We often thanked donors for "being part of our story."

Observations and Outcomes

The two primary goals for the year were expanding our overall donor base and growing the library's Student Opportunity Fund.

In 2014, the number of library donors increased by 52 percent from 2013. The number of gifts has increased by more than 27 percent. The value of the average annual gift to the library increased by 43 percent. The total number of gifts went from 571 to 673 gifts, which is an increase of 18 percent. Not only did our number of gifts increase but the average individual gift went from \$161 in 2013 to \$371. Overall donors in 2014 gave larger gifts. We also increased our number of donors from 323 in 2013 to 410 donors in 2014, this is a 27 percent increase. These numbers represent overall giving to the library in our anniversary year across many programs and projects. A certain percentage of gifts were given in recognition of our milestone anniversary; 7.2 percent of total fundraising was directly connected to the 21st campaign.

As stated before, there was a large effort to have a unified look for this campaign, which included photos, audio, and video. The diverse tools used in this campaign added costs to our total fundraising budget for the year but only accounted for 7.8 percent of total fundraising allocations.

A particular effort was made to reconnect with lapsed donors during this campaign. Our records indicate 31.2 percent of all donors from the 21st campaign were classified as lapsed. The range of time during which this group's giving had lapsed, ranged from two years to 29 years. This suggests the affinity donors have for the University Library is strong. Research in the marketing field illustrates that it's both easier and more cost effective to recapture lapsed donors than recruit new ones (Griffin & Lowenstein, 2001).

Our second goal was to grow the library's Student Opportunity Fund. In 2013, the fund's balance was \$1,633.83. At the close of the *21 Stories* campaign, the balance of the fund was \$18,596. This fund total reflects numerous modest-sized individual gifts. This represented a strong start for the pilot year of this evergreen fund.

An ancillary but significant benefit of the *21 Stories* campaign was a comprehensive update of information in our donor records. We were able to purge outdated e-mail address, add new e-mail addresses, update physical addresses, and augment on individual households. We did this by inviting response e-mails and collecting and reviewing returned mail. Special provisions for the latter had to be made with the post office and came at a nominal cost. These housekeeping activities will make future communication efforts more efficient.

The increase in the average gift tells us that when donors have more information about what we are doing or unique programs we are offering, they are more likely to give a larger amount. Donors that trust an organization and are able to see success demonstrated by the organization are more likely to become major gift donors (Waters, 2008). The increased support in the Student Opportunity Fund shows that donors are drawn to programs that appear to directly impact students. This is valuable information as we continue to develop a variety of cases for support around projects in the library.

Conclusion

University Library development staff learned many lessons in the course of the *21 Stories* fundraising and communications campaigns. While research has shown that donors want fewer contacts from soliciting non-profits, or at a minimum, prefer to determine how many times they are contacted (Sargeant, 2001), responses to the *21 Stories* campaign indicated that most donors appreciate the type and number of communications they are receiving from the University Library. Less than 20 donors, from a pool of more than 2,500, unsubscribed from the library's external relations contact list over the course of the campaign. We also learned something about the viability of on-site events for our organization. A small, but loyal group

of donors want to be included in library events, while a notable percentage of others are happy to give without attending library community gatherings. A portion of each anniversary event ticket was a gift in support of student programs. Many donors purchased tickets, but opted out of the actual event. Consistent with research and practice, more dollars were raised in the course of the library's milestone anniversary year via face-to-face solicitation.

Outcomes of these parallel library outreach efforts underscore the entwined nature of development and external relations. Clear and compelling communications facilitate effective fundraising. Though public relations is often considered non-essential for libraries (Marshall, 2001), in the case of the IUPUI University Library, a strategic approach to communications led to measurable improvements in fundraising outcomes. By telling stories that represented the many ways one academic library and its community worked together to inspire and support a generation of students, development staff successfully strengthened links with current and past donors (including lapsed donors), and created fruitful connections with new donors.

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Bios:

Taylor Bennet is the Assistant Director of Development at the IUPUI University Library. She has her Masters of Public Affairs with a Non-profit Management Focus from IUPUI's School of Public and Environmental Affairs. Taylor also sits on the Young Non-profit Professionals Network Indy Chapter's board. In her role at the library she is involved in fundraising, communications, and event planning all of which were used during the 21st Anniversary Celebration.



Kindra Orr is currently Assistant Dean for Administration at the IUPUI University Library. Having served as Director of Development and External Relations from 2007-2014, she has a diverse background in fundraising and communications that includes more than a decade of experience as a public television producer. She enjoys being a part of the IUPUI community, where civic engagement is a core value and where she is inspired daily by her colleagues' commitment to lifelong learning.

Appendix
Story Matrix

<p>21- The Heart of the Campus An introduction to the library's landmark building and the ways it has shaped the life of the campus and the city of Indianapolis. <i>E-mail communication.</i></p>	<p>20- A Library Romance Portrait of a former student employee, his wife—who he met while working in the library, and their young daughter. <i>Electronic newsletter story.</i></p>	<p>19- I 3> UL Recap of the annual Valentine's Day feedback event during which patrons share the things they love and do not love about the library. <i>Social media push.</i></p>	<p>18- Staying Ahead of the Game Portrait of one of IUPUI's Division One basketball players who happens to also be an avid library user. <i>Print piece, save-the-date postcard.</i></p>	<p>17- Building Bridges to Our City Spotlight on the unique digital collections that help the library and the campus bridge to the community. <i>Video via e-mail communication.</i></p>	<p>16- The Thinker & the Cheerleader Conversation between the Dean and long-time board member/friend regarding how far the library has come in 21 years. <i>Audio piece via e-mail communication.</i></p>	<p>15- Helping Students Afford their Education Portrait of an undergraduate employee who credits the library with teaching her how to work with others in a professional environment. <i>Print piece annual report.</i></p>
<p>14-How One Librarian Helped Another Find his Calling Conversation between two librarians, one of whom inspired the other to join the profession. <i>Audio piece via e-mail communication.</i></p>	<p>13- Creativity Unbound Highlights from our nationally-recognized artists' book collection. <i>Special exhibit at a local art collective.</i></p>	<p>12- Library as Training Ground Reflections from a graduate student employee, headed for a career in nonprofit service. <i>Print piece, Save-the-date postcard.</i></p>	<p>11-The Future of Libraries Perspectives on what's next for libraries from a current employee and library technology specialist. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>10- Art in the Library Snapshot of the most recent student winner of the library's annual atrium sculpture competition and her work. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>9- Our Collective Intellectual Life Thoughts from a nationally-known faculty member and scholar on the role of the library in the academic community. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>8- Stamina Matters Portrait of the Dean and his thoughts on librarians in the 21st Century. <i>Video via e-mail communication.</i></p>
<p>7- Knowledge for All Story about the library's views on and investment in Open Access. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>6- A Legacy of Innovation Story about how a local telecom corporation helped the library become a technology leader. <i>Electronic newsletter story.</i></p>	<p>5- Archives: Beyond Books Behind the scenes look at the library's special collections. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>4- What is Philanthropy? Profile of a donor who was pioneer in the field of philanthropy and helped establish the library's Philanthropy Collections. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>3- Ahead of her Time Short biography of the forward-thinking first director to serve in the library's landmark building. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>2- A Vision for Teaching in Libraries Profile of the second director of the library who established our program of library instruction. <i>Print piece, annual report.</i></p>	<p>1- A Place Set Apart An exploration of library as place, touching on how the library serves individual students and the wider campus community. <i>Live video presentation at event.</i></p>