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From Hearts and Roses to Gore and Ghouls: Student Engagement at Li Ka Shing Library

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The Li Ka Shing Library at Singapore Management University, SMU, employs various techniques for student engagement. One of the reasons for a high level of student engagement could be the fact that students see librarians throughout the academic cycle in multiple settings. SMU students are required to attend a compulsory orientation session at the library. A large number of SMU freshmen then attend an intensive library training session as a part of their Academic Writing course. Students also get to know us within the classroom environment – where librarians go to conduct 'in class' library training sessions focused on the very specific information and research needs of individual courses. This interaction – even though it is formal and regulated – sets the tone for the more quasi-formal and informal student engagement activities. The fact that SMU is a relatively small university with a city campus may also positively impact the success of our student engagement activities.

Here is a list of some of the different student engagement activities/scenarios at SMU:

- In 2012, the library set up a Student Suggestion Board. The suggestion board has proved to be very popular with and we have been able to individually and publically respond to every comment/suggestion that we have received.
- Another activity that garnered a lot of student participation was the '*Ask and You Shall Receive'* campaign, whereby students recommended DVD titles. We were able to add over 90 percent of the recommended titles to the collection.
- The library worked very closely with STRATEGICA – a student club focused on Games – who advised us on the selection of board games and digital games for the library's collection.
- The 10-member Library Advisory Committee includes representatives from the student community, which provides a formal platform for engaging students.
- In addition to these activities/initiatives, the library organizes tea parties, textbook fairs and events such as valentine day's love notes.

One of the most successful student engagement activities in recent times has been the celebration of Halloween at the library. The fan base of the library's Facebook page grew by almost 20 percent in that one day alone. Photographs taken on the day went viral and students were very vocal in their appreciation of the 'TLC' provided by SMU Librarians.

At the time of planning for Halloween, we set out clear objectives for the event/campaign. We wanted to:

1. Provide some much needed stress relief through fun for students preparing for projects and exams. This particular week of the term is considered one of the most grueling for our students.
2. Highlight the library's Facebook page
3. 'Humanize' the librarians and challenge stereotypes
4. Increase student engagement

As mentioned before, part of the reason why this campaign was so successful was that a large number of students were already familiar with the librarians from the more 'formal' interactions such as training sessions and reference desk assistance. We leveraged on that familiarity and built from there – correctly assuming that the students would enjoy the new and informal avatar of the library as well as the librarians. Another reason was the very creative use of social media.

The Halloween celebrations kick off with the creation of a Facebook profile for "Friendly Ghosty". This was a character that was created to generate some buzz about the event. In order to add to the buzz, pictures of four of the library staff posing as Ghosty by dressing in a specially rented ghost costume were taken and posted on the library's Facebook page. This also served as the starting point of the "Guess which Library Staff" is haunting the library. Here is that picture:

The four possibilities for 'Guess Which Library Staff'?

On Halloween day, one of the four library staff featured in the picture dressed as Ghosty, but this time with the face covered with a ghost mask as well. In addition to Ghosty, the students also saw Dracula – another staff member who was at work all day in a Dracula costume and makeup. Ghosty and Dracula made a total of three circuits around the library, distributing sweets, posing for pictures and scaring students. Their entourage (librarians and library staff) walked around with them, forming a small procession, also offering sweets, engageing with students and posing and taking pictures. The pictures were instantly uploaded on our Facebook page, and as they went viral, we had more and more students coming to the library and asking when Ghosty and Drac would make their next appearance!

"Drac" at the Information Desk

'Drac' and 'Ghosty' at the Service Desk

The library garnered an additional 368 "likes" on that day.

The success of this campaign has been far reaching – we have had questions and compliments from faculty and staff members, and the tag of 'fun and friendly' librarians seems to have stuck!

We plan to continue creating such fun traditions at the library – enriching the students' experience – often unexpectedly – the Li Ka Shing Library way.

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