

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:  
4 Key Takeaways from the  
Taylor & Francis Charleston Library  
Conference Panel Q&A



## Introduction

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In November 2016, Taylor & Francis presented its first White Paper and hosted an interactive panel discussion at the Charleston Library Conference. The panelists of this “lively lunch” spoke at length about librarians’ techniques for demonstrating their libraries’ value, marketing their collections, and engaging with university students, faculty, and administration.

When the floor opened up for questions, the panelists were able to delve into more detail about the real issues that librarians face as they work to advocate for themselves and their libraries as crucial aspects of the university community.

**“I think that conferences like [the Charleston Library Conference] are great for idea-sharing – the comments that people make in the Q&A sections of panels, for example. An idea from a school that’s very practical, I can bring back to my school.”**

### The panel discussion’s Q&A section covered topics including:

- Addressing unfeasible student requests
- Nurturing relationships with students
- Supporting digital humanities initiatives
- Library marketing tactics

## Question 1:

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Surveys and library advisory boards are great ways to gather patrons’ insights, but sometimes when librarians open themselves up for suggestions, they receive requests that can’t be put into practice. **How do librarians contend with unattainable requests?**

- **Craft your questions carefully.** Think about what you want to know from students and compose your questions around those subjects. Steer the conversation toward the areas that will be most productive and positive, and away from subjects that will force you to give negative responses.
- **Choose your battles.** You won’t be able to satisfy everyone’s requests and suggestions all the time – so don’t. Instead, try to find at least one comment from your survey that you can put into practice. Setting your sights on goals that you can reach will show your students that you’re listening while also managing their expectations.

- **Explain why not.** A commonly-requested change to library protocol is allowing food to be brought into the library. There are plenty of reasons why this isn't always feasible – bugs, sticky keyboards, or the cost of clearing food, to name a few – so why not say so? When you share your reasoning, you make students part of the conversation instead of giving their requests a flat “no.”

## Question 2:

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If a student has a negative experience with the library, they may associate that experience with the university as a whole and be less likely to support the university through donations after graduating. **How do librarians nurture the student relationship?**

- **Help them overcome stress.** Give your students a break from their stressful studies. Even seemingly small gestures, like providing hot chocolate during finals, can resonate with students and make a big difference to their wellbeing. You might even have some future librarians in your midst who could carry on your practices in their own careers.
- **Make a good impression.** You may only have a short period of time to foster loyalty and trust in the library among students. Once the semester changes, students' new courses may not require them to visit the library with the same frequency, so catch them while they're with you.
- **Share the relationship with other university offices.** Focus on creating valuable, fair, and positive experiences for your current students at the library, and trust your development office to nurture the alumni relationship.

## Question 3:

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Digital humanities initiatives can be a moving target without the advantage of a dedicated digital humanities office on campus. **How can libraries support the digital humanities without a specific digital humanities liaison or office?**

- **It takes a village.** Two out of the three panelists came from universities with centralized offices for the digital humanities, and affirmed that successfully supporting digital humanities initiatives takes a committed group of people. Even with a point of contact, this process was not without its pitfalls.
  - **If your university DOES have a digital humanities office:** Sometimes when there is too much focus placed on job titles, important work can fall through the cracks. Remain vigilant of being lulled into the expectation that “the DH person will handle that.”
  - **If your university DOES NOT have a digital humanities office:** Your library's support can help keep digital humanities initiatives running, but they may not grow on their own without a designated advocate. Be on the lookout for ways you can help your digital humanities program grow or evolve rather than running in neutral.

## Question 4:

The panel touched on the importance of outreach initiatives to communicate the library's value to the larger university community. **What specific methods and media do librarians use to market themselves?**

- **Communications officers.** Our panelists who had dedicated library communications officers viewed this as a luxury. If you don't have a library communications officer, look to the departments your library serves, which may have more extensive communications resources. Ask if your library's messaging can share air-time with the department's.
- **Social media.** Successful social media strategy requires considerable care and feeding, so interacting often and holding peoples' interests is a must. Pay attention to whether social media is actually getting people in the door, and don't be afraid to drop social platforms that aren't doing you any favors.
- **LCD panels.** Many university departments have LCD panels that broadcast departmental information on an ongoing loop. Aside from running your messages on your own building's screens, see if you can get your message posted in other buildings to diversify your readership.

## Conclusion

Conferences like the Charleston Library Conference are instrumental in helping librarians who might not otherwise have occasion to meet exchange ideas, share best practices, and strategize on how to improve tactics that may not have been successful. Our goal during our 2016 Charleston Library Conference panel discussion, other than presenting our first White Paper, was to give our audience useful tools to bring back to their own institutions, and to create a collaborative space for dialogue among librarians.

Visit the Taylor & Francis [Resources for Librarians](#) page to learn more about our commitment to the librarian-publisher relationship.



## References

The contents of this snapshot were derived from a white paper entitled, "Creative, Evolving, Relevant: Communicating the Library's Value" and its subsequent presentation in a panel discussion at the 2016 Charleston Library Conference.

### Charleston 2016 Panel Discussion, November 2016

Thurston Miller, Chemistry and Physics Librarian, University of Notre Dame

Doug Way, Associate University Librarian for Collections and Research Services, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Krystie Wilfong, Collection Assessment & Analysis Librarian, Columbia University

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