No Muggles in the Library Tonight! Harry Potter Night at an Academic Library

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Abstract

This article describes how an annual Harry Potter Night program fits into a college library's mission. The literature shows college and university libraries are already accustomed to supporting their campus communities' academic and cocurricular needs. Harry Potter Night at Lycoming College is an engaging experience. For one Friday night a year, the college library transforms into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry through food, decorations, and music. The central events are variations of trivia games and two obstacle courses, one focusing on Voldemort's horcruxes and the other focusing on the Sorcerer's Stone. These games and simulations are critical to creating an emotionally immersive as well as a multisensory experience. The attendance for this program has ranged from 30 to 100 students (on a campus of approximately 1,400), and the enthusiasm has been immense. This program has led to positive attitudes toward the library and valuable publicity in campus publications and has strengthened the library's relationship with the college Residential Life office.

Introduction

Harry Potter is a literary and cultural phenomenon, the likes of which has never been seen before. The seven books about the boy wizard by author J. K. Rowling and the accompanying movies have enchanted children and adults alike. Granger (2011) points out that "with sales of well over 400 million copies—dwarfing all published works not written by God or Chairman Mao—the *Harry Potter* series is the shared text of our time" (p. 52). Each of the first seven films uniquely holds a place in the thirty top-grossing films of all time (Bethune, 2011).

Today's college students grew up with Harry Potter. The first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone,* was originally published in 1997, before some of these students could even read on their own. They identified with Harry, Ron, and Hermione as they went through their fantastical adventures as well as those tribulations all teenagers must go through. Hermione made smart girls cool, while Ron eased even the hardest situation with humor. More than any other book series, Harry Potter inspired a love of reading in this generation.

This article will describe an annual Harry Potter Night hosted by a small academic library with support from the college's Residential Life office and the provost's curriculum-enrichment fund. This event was a multisensory experience for participants. Through the combination of food, costumes, music, decorations, and contests, our students had an opportunity to leave their muggle identities at Platform 9¾ and become students of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Most important, the event featured a number of games and simulations, which were a key part of the immersive experience. These new witches and wizards had the opportunity to show how much they know about their beloved hero's story and even accompany Harry on some of his adventures.

While a college library's primary concern is to support the educational pursuits of its students and faculty, nonacademic outreach programs can support the library's mission in multiple ways. Events such as Harry Potter Night provide numerous publicity opportunities for the library and help participants see the library and its staff in a positive light. They also promote the idea of the library as a cultural center and not merely a repository for the resources it holds. Furthermore, these events support scholarship indirectly, as studies show cocurricular involvement and promotion of reading for fun among college students can lead to academic success (Mahaffy, 2009). Finally, the event offers opportunities to collaborate with other departments and offices on campus, strengthening those relationships, which leads to other opportunities for the library.

Background

Cahoy and Snavely (2007) cite a number of studies that demonstrate the importance of cocurricular programming in academic libraries and student services. They define cocurricular activities as "those student experiences that take place outside the formal classroom setting and may include student clubs and organizations, athletics, and living-learning programs" (p. 121). Several of the cited studies in their chapter conclude that the most effective cocurricular programs are those that combine leisure activities with intellectual content. College and university libraries are accustomed to supporting scholarly pursuits through collections, instruction, and study space as well as nonacademic purposes through leisure reading, popular film collections, and cafes. Furthermore, many campus libraries

no longer restrict use of their technologies to only course work, allowing students to use library computers to check e-mail, visit social networking sites such as Facebook, and play online games. Furthermore, many college libraries provide special programs that clearly extend beyond the strictly academic.

One of the most common ways academic libraries bridge the academic-versus-leisure gap is through their orientation programs. Many have open-house events at the beginning of school like the University at Albany's LibraryPalooza (Anderson, 2010), self-guided tours (Marcus & Beck, 2003), or games to help orient new students to the library (Boykin & Willson-Metzger, 2005; Burrow, Marsh, Franklin, & Wallace, 2003; Gregory & Broussard, 2011; Smith & Baker, 2011). These events often include raffles, games, and tours to promote a broader awareness of the physical and virtual library's collections and services. Others have similar game-based events that are held inside a particular library class session, like Eckenrode's "Amazing Race" (2008), where library instruction was turned into a reality show.

Other university libraries have extended their liaison programs to include administrative offices and student organizations as well. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro established a liaison program that included sixteen offices and organizations around campus ranging from student government to the campus radio station (Crowe, 2010). The University at Albany's reference department participates in campus information fairs for new and prospective students, as well as reaching out to residence hall directors and residential assistants (Anderson, 2010). Other libraries have made special efforts to reach out to special groups, such as athletes or minorities (Gray, 2010; O'English & McCord, 2006). The University of Minnesota was able to create a new full-time librarian position dedicated to diversity outreach (Gray, 2010). In all of these cases, the outreach efforts specifically focus on finding new venues for marketing the library's collections and services.

Beyond the outreach programs specifically focused on marketing, most cocurricular programs in academic libraries have an obvious intellectual component. Many serve as a venue for scholarly presentations and discussions hosted by campus faculty or visiting scholars. These programs include poetry readings, book talks, and research presentations. Specific examples of this type of outreach found in the literature include Nicholls State University's Cajun music festival and voter registration table and display (Viator, Goldsmith, & Fonseca, 2008) and The University of Idaho's Jewish literature series (Smith, Hunter, & Eckwright, 2009). Programs such as these aim to engage participants intellectually and to help libraries become more than warehouses for books and journals; they become the intellectual crossroads of their larger institutions.

Some college and university libraries are adopting the recreational

goals similar to public libraries through video game collections and tournaments. Proponents of such programs argue that video games are an important part of our society and thus count as important primary sources deserving of preservation (Laskowski & Ward, 2009). Others use video game tournaments in libraries as a way to reach student gamer populations, which they assume are less likely to be regular library users (Sutton & Womack, 2006). The University of Illinois added a scholarly aspect to their video game collection and programs with interdisciplinary, faculty-led discussions on topics such as music and video games that included not only faculty but also a local game design company representative who discussed how video game music is composed (Laskowski & Ward, 2009).

In addition to the published literature, an informal survey on the COL-LIB-L listserv showed that a number of academic libraries host a wide variety of cocurricular programs. While the largest category was game nights (board games, video games, team trivia, or humans versus zombies), there were a number of other creative programs that could not easily be categorized. Examples included several stress-release programs during finals, a Halloween dinner, karaoke and other music programs, group knitting events, and readings of personal work or ghost stories. Rationales included getting (new) people into the library, presenting the library as a fun place, and humanizing the library staff. Several believed the library served as a cultural or community center, and one librarian pointed out that their library "supports learning of all kinds" and all programs have some kind of "educational or developmental component" (Zitron, personal communication, November 22, 2011).

While programs that promote popular literature are much more common in public and school libraries, they are not unprecedented in academic libraries. University of Florida libraries host an annual Edible Book Contest where participants decorate cakes based on fiction and nonfiction alike (Malanchuk, 2010). The University of Northern Iowa's library collaborated with two local public libraries to host an event based on Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* series ("Reading lets teens travel," 2009). Mahaffy (2009) describes New Mexico State University's program to celebrate multicultural and bilingual children's literature and their participation in the national Big Read event. Tvaruzka (2009) describes another children's program at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire to promote early literacy and enjoyment of reading.

Such programs fit into a college library's mission when the library strives to be a cultural center on campus. Lycoming College's Snowden Library mission statement concludes with the intentionally open-ended sentence, "Through its programs and resources Snowden Library invites the college community to engage in the ongoing intellectual dialogue that defines, enhances and shapes our world" (http://www.lycoming.edu/library/mis sionstatement.aspx). Supporting statements solidify the wording of the

mission statement and include the specific goal of "contribut[ing] imaginatively to the cultural and intellectual life of the college." Harry Potter Night therefore supports the library's mission goals as it fits into the cultural life of Lycoming College.

The Birth of Harry Potter Night

Lycoming College is a small liberal arts college of approximately 1400 students in north central Pennsylvania. Our student body is mostly residential and of traditional college age. The Snowden Library has a rich tradition of outreach programming, including Snowden 'til 2 (our late-night prefinals event each fall), a Read-In, Banned Books Week activities, and a game-based freshman orientation (Gregory & Broussard, 2011). In addition to these programs, our small campus is conducive to close working relationships with professors, academic support, administrative offices, and student affairs. In addition to these advantages, we have a supportive director and two creative instructional librarians who are avid fans of Harry Potter.

Harry Potter Night at the Snowden Library was born from a suggestion made by a student worker. The idea of basing a program on such a popular book and movie series was appealing because of the preexisting enthusiasm of its fans. In addition, the books allowed for a great deal of creativity and humor in programming. The librarian was excited about the idea, and the director was willing to provide a budget of $50 for food. That first Harry Potter Night was held on a Wednesday night with a small table of themed food prepared from recipes by Britta Peterson (http://www.britta.com/hogwarts/recipes.html). The librarian wore a simple witch costume, and the main entertainment was centered around Harry Potter *Scene It*, which was played informally.

As simple as the first program was, it was an enormous success with nearly fifty students, faculty, and faculty children in attendance. The next semester, we sought additional funding through Residential Life and the Provost's office for food and prizes (with a total budget of $150), and an additional librarian eagerly joined in the planning process. A number of additional members of the library staff volunteered to help prepare an impressive spread of food. To avoid disturbing students trying to study, the event was moved to a Friday night after the library closed.

The second Harry Potter Night was a more elaborate event and became a totally immersive and multisensory experience. As one participant exclaimed, "It looks like Hogwarts threw up in here!" Library faculty, teaching faculty, and one Residential Life staff member dressed as characters from the books. Students entered the library by walking through the brick wall of Platform 9¾ (a large piece of fabric sponge-painted to look like a brick wall). They were immediately greeted by mood lighting, the music of the movie soundtracks, and the smell of pumpkins and butterscotch.

Students followed the Hogwarts Express, past the Knight Bus (a converted book cart), to be placed into houses by the Sorting Hat. The library was decorated with floating paper candles, cobwebs, vinyl castle decals, cauldrons, artificial skulls, fake Hogwarts library books, bowls of floo powder, The Fat Lady, and house banners. With nearly doubled attendance from the previous semester's event and immeasurable enthusiasm, Harry Potter Night became an annual event.

To keep the event fresh for participants and organizers, each implementation of Harry Potter Night has included different activities. Components that remained identical from year to year included a costume competition, a Dobby-esque sock competition, the Sorting Hat, and a potions table. The potions table was stocked with several flavors of Gatorade, marshmallows, colored sugar, and whipped cream, each labeled as a potion ingredient from the series. Students recorded recipes and the purpose of each potion, and submissions were voted on for creativity at the end of the night. Activities that rotated included fortune telling, signatures by Gilderoy Lockhart, sock decorating, and Build-a-Burrow. One year we also hosted two scholarly talks by professors in the days preceding the big event.

In addition to these activities and competitions, there were several games and simulations. These were the central events of each implementation of Harry Potter Night. These games were a critical part of the immersive experience as they engage the participants emotionally in a way that food and costume competitions cannot. They were designed to allow as many participants as possible.

There were always trivia games that served as main events, but they took on various forms each year. Harry Potter *Jeopardy!* left students and organizers unsatisfied in that it allowed for only three people to participate at a time. Fortunately, we had also scheduled Wizards' Duel Trivia earlier in the night. Based on the wizard duel class led by Professor Lockhart in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, this was a fast-paced trivia game that allows everyone in a large group to participate. Players formed two lines, facing each other. The moderator asked the two players at the end of each line a relatively short question (i.e., "What did Dumbledore tell Harry he saw in the Mirror of Erised?" Answer: socks). The first player to answer correctly moved to the back of his or her line, while the other player was eliminated from that round. As this goes quickly even with a large group, we were able to play several rounds of Wizards' Duel Trivia in a short period of time. This was our most popular event. Other versions of Harry Potter trivia included Pensieve Trivia, where questions in the form of memories were printed on thin silver strips of paper and pulled out of an elaborate pewter bowl and players had to identify the owner of the memory, and Multimedia Trivia, which included pictures and sound clips to enhance textual questions.

In the later years of this event, we adopted a metagame to award a House Cup at the end of the night. One of the staple events was the Sorting Hat, fashioned from a paper grocery bag. Upon entering the library, students were directed to the Sorting Hat. They reached into the hat's mouth to pull out a house badge, which they were to pin on their clothes for the rest of the evening. Individuals earned points (printed on pieces of purple paper) through the evening's activities. One person for each house was selected to collect the team's points in an envelope. At the end of the evening, each house tallied its total points and a winner was announced. The prize for the winning house was being featured on a READ poster. The picture was taken at the end of the evening, students' names were recorded, and each individual received a copy of the poster when it was printed. While each participant who came in costume was awarded a homemade Pygmy Puff (a large pompom with googly eyes), there were no individual prizes awarded. Our campus printing office is inexpensive, and READ posters are very popular among our students, so this is a highly desired prize at a relatively low expense.

Other games included Quidditch toss and a bowtruckle finding game. The Quidditch toss involved a refrigerator box painted sky blue. Three Quidditch hoops were painted onto the cardboard, with their centers cut out to create holes. House flags were added to the sides for decoration. Players lined up in four rows, organized by house teams, and each team took a turn trying to get a ball into a hole. Each house earned a point for a successful toss. Bowtruckles are stick-like creatures that guard trees (http://www.hp-lexicon.org/bestiary/bestiary_b.html). Our bowtruckles were sticks with googly eyes glued on them. They were hidden throughout the first floor of the library, along with one Golden Snitch. Players worked in teams to fill their buckets with as many bowtruckles as possible, earning their house a point for each. The Golden Snitch was worth thirty points.

We prepared obstacle courses during two of the events. The first, to celebrate the recent release of the final book, was a Horcrux Hunt. Players completed seven activities to simulate the trials Harry went through to obtain and destroy the Horcruxes that contained parts of Voldemort's soul. For example, to get the locket, players went to the basement where paper ghosts hung from the ceiling. Participants had to drink "poison" (green Jello) in clear Dixie cups using a straw. The last Horcrux event asked each team to name the ideal punishment for Voldemort. Submissions were judged, and the winning team earned points for their house. We chose to celebrate the last of the movies by going back to the first book and organized an activity similar to the trials Harry and his friends went through to obtain the Sorcerer's Stone. Among other activities, participants had to twist through yarn strung among the stacks without setting off the attached bells (a simulation of the Devil's Snare); climb over a knocked-out troll (made of bean bag chairs); and decode a backward message on a life-

sized Mirror of Erised. The competition was to produce the most creative answer for the question, "What would Fred and/or George Weasley have seen in the Mirror of Erised?"

OUTCOMES

While we did not formally assess Harry Potter Night, we have had a good deal of anecdotal evidence that this program has been a success. The primary evidence has been attendance. Attendance has ranged from thirty participants to nearly one hundred (seventy of whom stayed for most of the evening). Attendance seems more closely related to the timing of competing events on campus than marketing or programming efforts on the library's part. Unfortunately, we have made commitments to a particular date in advance, only to find we were competing with a student-organized haunted house or the annual Campus Activities Board formal. However, regardless of the attendance numbers, it has always been a very enthusiastic audience with a majority of the participants staying for the entirety of the event.

The comments received have been overwhelmingly positive. One highlight for the organizers was when a freshman student exclaimed that Harry Potter Night was the most fun she had had so far at Lycoming College. A loyal fan base was established with many of the same students returning each year and approaching librarians at other times of year to ask when it would be held again. The library occasionally offers itself as a case study for management classes to analyze how we can improve our services. In 2007, we had a particularly insightful group who offered a number of suggestions on signs and services that we chose to adopt. They requested additional programs like Harry Potter Night and offered the *Twilight* series as a suggestion. After a short discussion, the librarians involved decided there was not as much creative material to work with to create an equally immersive experience. However, it was very gratifying that our hard work with Harry Potter Night was memorable to these students.

Residential Life is a popular target for library outreach in the professional literature because of its connection to where students live and play. The assistance and participation received from our Residential Life office have become a permanent part of our library's culture. Since the initiation of Harry Potter Night, Residential Life has asked librarians to participate in several educational programs on topics such as plagiarism and identity theft, and librarians have served on several Residential Life search committees. Furthermore, the Residential Life staff has been willing to distribute library surveys in the residential halls and participate in other library events.

The library has received a fair amount of positive publicity in campus publications. Student journalists who were Harry Potter fans wrote several favorable articles on the event in the campus newspaper. We were asked

to write a short article for the alumni publication, which included the 2007 READ poster featuring Lycoming College staff and faculty dressed as Hogwarts characters. Additionally, Harry Potter Night was even featured on the college home page following the program 1 year.

In 2009, we were asked to participate in a community effort to bring the National Library of Medicine's *Harry Potter's World: Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine* display (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/harry pottersworld/) to our area. Our contribution was to welcome the community to our Harry Potter Night, which had previously been restricted to Lycoming College staff and students. Our established Harry Potter programming enhanced the application, and our community received the traveling display in February and March 2011. This provided additional positive publicity in our broader community for our library and college.

Our efforts to add an educational component to Harry Potter Night with scholarly talks was disappointing. The topics included fairy tales in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and Christianity in the Harry Potter series, led respectively by German and religion professors. While the quality of talks provided was excellent, the attendance was mostly library staff with only one or two students at each event. While other libraries have reported success with such discussions in the library, and indeed the Snowden Library has hosted a number of successful faculty discussions and fireside chats, these two did not draw the expected audience. Perhaps if we had asked relevant faculty to announce and endorse the talks in class or offer extra credit for attendance, the student turnout would have improved. We chose to discontinue this aspect of our Harry Potter programming in the subsequent years.

Finally, a group of students particularly interested in Harry Potter and who helped decorate the library and run the program became a very useful focus group for the development of several online library games. The students met twice formally, providing their input on online games and library game ideas in exchange for home-cooked food. They were also solicited by e-mail for informal feedback at other times. Some of these same students later volunteered to work at our revised game-based orientation. While they have since graduated, their legacy continues.

CONCLUSION

The future of Harry Potter Night in the Snowden Library is uncertain. We believe there are probably another few years left in the enthusiasm students continue to have for Harry Potter despite the conclusion of the books and movies. It has been a labor of love, but it is still a great deal of work for the library staff. With increasing responsibilities elsewhere, we have decided to suspend Harry Potter Night this year. However, we are not yet willing to commit to the end of this historically successful program.

Harry Potter Night has generated a great deal of goodwill between the library and a particular segment of the student population at Lycoming College. The students have made their appreciation of our hard work very clear. Through this program, we have received a good amount of coverage in the campus newspaper and alumni publications and have strengthened our relationship with the Residential Life office. We will continue to look for similar opportunities for fun and creative programs that engage students on many levels and encourage students to interact with the library in new ways.

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