

The Socially Distanced Academic Library

A Case Study Series of Best Practices during COVID-19

Chapman University's Leatherby Libraries Ramp Up Marketing and Promotion

Founded in 1861 as Hesperian College in Woodland, CA, Chapman University is a private institution whose residential campus is 30 miles from Los Angeles in Orange County. As of Fall 2020, it had enrolled a total of 9,761 undergraduate and graduate students and offered 146 undergraduate degrees and programs and 71 graduate degrees and programs.

Situated in a 100,000-square-foot building built in 2003 and centrally located on campus, Leatherby Libraries consist of nine separate subject libraries. Leatherby also provides library services to the university's Rinker Health Science Campus in Irvine.

On March 19, 2020, Chapman University went fully remote to slow the spread of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic. The most pressing challenge for Development Librarian Essraa Nawar and Library Events & External Relations Assistant Rachel Karas was communication. "Our number-one priority" says Nawar, "was communicating clearly to the staff, students, faculty, and the larger community about the available resources that we would be offering, everything from reference to circulation, to curbside pick-up services."

A Robust Marketing Platform

Working closely with the library administration, Nawar and Karas were able to quickly ramp up their outreach efforts thanks to a solid and well-established online marketing and communications strategy that incorporated the Leatherby Libraries website (<https://www.chapman.edu/library/>), blog (<https://blogs.chapman.edu/library>), social media (<https://www.facebook.com/LeatherbyLibraries> and <https://www.instagram.com/leatherbylibraries/>), and a recently launched (2019) bimonthly digital newsletter (<https://bit.ly/3uzkkLO>).

The team also initiated a "Leatherby Libraries from Home" social media series showcasing the Libraries' collections and used a weekly "This Week in the Libraries" email to university staff to keep them informed about resources as well as boost morale with personal stories about staff activities. "We had the tools," notes Nawar. "We just had to increase the amount of communication and strategically be able to do this."

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The Highlights

The Challenge:

The Leatherby team's number-one concern was leveraging its already impressive outreach operation to communicate new service and resource details to the library community.

The Solution:

The Leatherby Libraries website, blog, social media, and a bimonthly e-newsletter were all used to get the information out. Additionally, the library developed a special social media campaign to showcase its collection as well as a weekly email to staff to keep them up to date on available resources and boost morale. Messaging was tailored to closely follow university guidelines.

The Results:

In 2020, Facebook postings more than doubled to 353 compared to the same period a year prior. Instagram postings leapt from 83 in 2019 to 279 in 2020.

This was especially challenging once the student assistants, some of whom were helping with the blog, were let go at the end of the spring 2020 semester. “It was actually good from a work perspective because our events and marketing assistant, Rachel, needed to have some more work for her to do,” explains Nawar. With events cancelled for 2020, the team focused on promoting the Leatherby Libraries and writing about their resources and librarians.

Leatherby Libraries’ Interim Dean Kevin Ross has high praise for the team’s efforts. “They were really staying on top of social media and getting the message out there because the information was so dynamic and changing so quickly all the time.” In a comparison of social media platform posts, Leatherby’s Facebook postings more than doubled from 153 in 2019 to 353, while Instagram postings jumped from 83 in 2019 to 279 in 2020.

Piggybacking on Admin Messaging

Nawar and Karas also made sure to get their message about Leatherby Libraries’ services into the university president’s weekly emails. The team worked closely with the vice president of the Strategic Marketing and Communications group responsible for overall communications. “We were really trying to follow the guidelines of the university and amplify those guidelines on our website,” says the dean. “And we would talk about specific services that we could offer in light of the current situation.”

Ross, who became interim dean in September 2020, ramped up the library’s communications in other ways. He started sending out emails in tandem with the president’s email blasts. He also instituted monthly town hall meetings via Microsoft Teams, inviting speakers from across the campus and giving the library staff an opportunity to ask questions. “We were trying to err on the side of over-communicating, and that was what the university was doing as well.”

Communication was also key to staying connected to library donors. During the initial shutdown in March,

Nawar as development librarian reached out to her donors via phone calls, texts, and videoconferencing platforms like Zoom to reassure them that library services were still being provided. Every few months she would send her donors an extensive newsletter that started with a message from Dean Ross, followed by details about the library’s myriad resources or changes to upcoming events or exhibits.

And then there were the personal touches, whether a birthday greeting from the dean or a thank you for a recent or upcoming gift. “We were always a team where we worked hand-in-hand, making sure that we were recognizing our donors,” explains Nawar. Despite the fundraising challenges created by the pandemic, she raised almost \$700,000 in gifts in 2020. “I think our

donors really see the importance of the libraries. And we try to the best of our ability to communicate to them how relevant we are despite the pandemic.”

A Crucial Member of the Campus Team

Nawar credits consistent messaging that kept Leatherby Libraries visible to the university community as the most important tool the communications team had used over the past 14 months. As a result, Dean Ross was invited to two university-level town halls to speak about the library’s efforts to support the faculty and students during the pandemic, and

both Nawar and the dean participated as committee members in Chapman University’s Safely Back reopening initiative. “This meant that everybody was seeing the library as a partner, whether it was dealing with the pandemic or the academic success of the students, faculty, and researchers,” says Nawar.

Dean Ross also stresses the lessons learned about the importance of ensuring that everybody was reached through both formal and informal communication methods. “I don’t think we were bad at communication prior to the pandemic. I just think we have gotten much better at it.”

\$700,000
The amount the development team managed to raise in gifts despite the challenges of the pandemic.

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