**Food for Fines: Helping Students and the Community**

A library has a unique opportunity to highlight its value to a community through the services it offers. A Food for Fines drive is a great way for a library to help students take care of their library fines and help the local community as well.

In the fall of 2011, I was brainstorming on ways my department, Access Services, could support our local community through the services it offers. My Fines Supervisor, Bethany Hardikar, suggested the UNT Libraries run a canned food drive where students could donate cans as a way to reduce their fines. Each year the libraries had a canned food drive which supported our local area food bank. Collection boxes were placed near the entrance of each of our libraries, but the drives were not tied directly to any library services. Offering a food for fines drive would enable students to clear up their overdue fines by donating cans, which in turn we could give to a local food bank. I decided, with support from our library administration, to conduct a food for fines drive that fall semester as a pilot project and if it was successful, continue to offer it as a service each semester. Offering a drive each semester would also help our local area food bank, which would benefit by receiving canned goods from our library each semester rather than just once a year.

**Planning**

In planning our first food for fines drive we had several things to determine. How would we structure the drive? Would we limit the kinds of cans we would accept? Would there be a maximum amount of cans accepted per student? How long would the drive run? What kind of marketing plan should be designed? Where would we store the cans during the drive? Who would we donate the cans to?

We decided the structure of the drive should be as simple as possible to make it easy for students to donate the cans and for staff to collect them. For each dent-free, non-expired, 12 oz or larger can donated, a $1 credit would be applied to the student’s library fines, up to $20. The maximum amount of cans a student could therefore donate would be 20 cans. We would also accept cans from anyone who wanted to contribute to the drive even if no fines were owed. The drive would take place in the middle of the semester and would run for two weeks.

Marketing was an important factor in making the drive successful. Signs were created by our External Relations Department and posted in various areas on campus as well as throughout our libraries. We advertised the service on our website, in the school newspaper and our library newsletter.

We designated several shelves in our workroom as a storage area to hold the cans during the drive. It was decided we would donate the cans to Denton County Friends of the Family, a local area charity that had a food pantry.

**Implementation**

The UNT Libraries first Food for Fines drive ran from November 7 to November 21 of 2011. The Access Services Staff was trained on how to process the cans collected and how to post the credits to the
students’ library accounts. We kept a chart to record how many cans were collected each day. Updates were posted to let staff know how the drive was going.

Results

Our first Food for Fines drive was very successful. We collected a total of 612 cans and waived $571.00 in fines. There were 57 students who participated. A report on the results was compiled and submitted to our Assistant Dean of Public Services.

Lessons Learned

After the drive was completed, I met with my Fines Supervisor to discuss what lessons we learned from conducting our first Food for Fines drive. Our initial observations were that both students and staff thought the Food for Fines drive was a good idea and it was great public relations for the libraries. We also were able to clear up some old accounts since students felt more encouraged to take care of their fines by giving cans rather than paying money. We concluded we would offer the drive each semester, with approval from the library administration.

We also realized that with future drives we could increase the number of cans collected through better marketing planning. We noticed during the two week drive that the majority of the cans we received came in during the second week. We attributed this to a marketing snafu we encountered. Our signs were not ready for posting when the drive began. Developing our marketing plans, including signage designs and placements, we decided should take place at least two months before a canned food drive is carried out.

Timing of the drive we found was also important. We decided we would conduct future drives at a time during each semester that would coincide with class registration. Since students were blocked from registering if they had a fine block with the UNT Libraries, we thought offering the drive during registration would be more beneficial for the students, making it easier for them to clear their blocks.

Another issue we needed to address was storage of the cans during the drive. We needed a larger shelving area for the cans because we collected more cans than we anticipated during the first drive and had to find available space quickly. We were able to find additional shelving space in our workroom.

Spring 2012 Food for Fines Drive

Our second food for fines drive ran from March 25 to April 7 of 2012. We collected 691 cans and waived $637.00 in fines. This was a 12.9% increase in the number of cans collected as compared to the fall 2011 drive. There were 58 students who participated.

Conclusion

Conducting a Food for Fines Drive is a creative, innovative and fun way to get students and the library involved in helping the community. There are many factors involved, including marketing and storage.
Although much planning must go into conducting a drive for it to be successful, the rewards are worth the efforts.

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