

Storytime at the Business Library! Encouraging Altruistic Motivation and Creativity Among Business Library Student Staff

ILANA STONEBRAKER
Indiana University-Bloomington
is1@iu.edu

Background

In Fall 2021, Indiana University-Bloomington was operating under a mask mandate, meaning masks were required for student and staff when not eating. As compared with Fall 2020, social distancing guidelines had been relaxed (food was now allowed), but since masks were still required in all spaces, library staff were required to enforce proper wearing of masks at service desks. Full-time staff each did daily mask reminders to ensure the space was in compliance with university policy. Mask reminders, either at the desk or as part of sweeps, were mostly politely received. While a situation never escalated to a patron being asked to leave the library, patrons were occasionally frustrated, and the mask reminders had almost no net positive cumulative effect on mask wearing, since so many students use the library space and very rarely are the same students there an hour to two hours later.

Fall 2021 was a time of low morale in our library spaces. We were no longer fully remote, but things were still strained. The four full-time staff of the Business/SPEA Library, which serves primarily the Kelley School of Business and O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, had been through a very stressful year of the pandemic, as had Business/SPEA's 25 student workers. Our position as enforcer of mask mandates, while totally required, had changed our relationship with the students in the library space. Our staff highly value their engagement with students and saw themselves as partners, not police. This new role of public space mask enforcement strained an already challenging time. Staff often spoke about burnout of this new role and how it made it hard to stay motivated.

Study Breaks at Business/SPEA Library

Around the middle of the semester, I started seeing a need for something to reinforce the customer service nature of the Business/SPEA Library space that had been lost in the public health mandate. In my previous role at another institution, I had surveyed students and knew they were very interested in study breaks in branch library spaces. Study break activities at large campuses happened in the main or undergraduate libraries for scale purposes, but students welcomed them in smaller specialized spaces as well. I solicited ideas from the full-time and part-time staff, particularly of the graduate library school students who I thought would be interested in running programming. Puzzles were an easy start and very popular. In addition, library school students learned how to do origami and put out demonstrations for this activity. Coloring pages was another one that came up. A graduate student worker made a poster describing all the options for study break activities.

The idea for children's books came out of conversations I had with undergraduate library staff. I have a small child and I was describing some of the business-themed plots of the books I had read him.

The student workers thought that business themed children's books would be a good addition to the coloring pages, puzzles, and origami.



Figure 1. Display of Children's Books. Photo by author.

storytelling and trained one of her education library student workers, along with one of our student staff at Business/SPEA. Our student workers made a flyer for the event and publicized it to their friends. The student workers then led a 30-minute storytime (see Figure 2). The Business/SPEA Library Head make cookies for the event.

I would recommend a children's business book display specifically because cost was very low and return on investment was high. Usually study breaks have quite a bit of one-time cost. Pizza is often a draw. Things like puzzles and coloring pages require supplies. The great part about a display of children's books is that there is almost no material cost. The books are already in the collection. In addition, a display of business-themed children's books advertises print book collections available through the library of which students might not be aware.

I don't believe that access to children's books would rank high on business school needs. However, I do believe that this sort of event really can fit into an MBA or even doctoral program. Academia has a large emphasis on telling stories and storytelling. Several instructors in the business school already required students to read a picture book. In addition, mental health initiatives are an important trend in business school programing. Events featuring children's books fit into the larger mental health trend in a way that reinforces both the print book aspect of the library's mission as well as

I contacted the education librarian and asked if our Business/SPEA library could borrow some business-themed children's books. We used LC subject headings to locate the books in her collection, then I put in the request for the books formally. Our operations manager investigated and found out how to make a temporary reserve section so the books could be checked out from our location.

When the books arrived, student workers made a great display (see Figure 1). Some examples of children's books pulled included: "Worm Gets a Job" by Kathy Caple, a book about a worm who keeps getting fired from jobs, and "Professional Crocodile" by Giovanna Zoboli, a book about a crocodile who loves where he works. Another book was "Tallulah the Tooth Fairy CEO" by Tamara Pizzoli, which centers on the board room politics of a tooth fairy corporation.

Now that we had the children's books, students started to read them, and the idea of doing a storytime event during finals week came up. The education librarian was well versed in

the subject focus. Children's business books are a real niche that other spaces like the career services do not have and a good way to reinforce the unique access that business librarians have to print collections.



Figure 2. Flyer for storytime event. Flyer designed by Ilana Stonebraker and Justin Harrison. ©2022 Indiana University

have continued the tradition again this past spring semester, which was very exciting for our student workers who designed the flyer and display and led the storytime event. Study break brainstorming gave student workers a project with direct patron impact. Children's books gave the library a chance to participate with finals season's mental health initiatives and showcase collections. Study break activities are one of my "pandemic projects" that I hope others adopt in the future.

In addition to potential benefits to users of the space, I believe that study breaks are a great example of how to encourage gratitude and altruism, particularly for undergraduate student staff. Undergraduate students were very recently in the K-12 system, and they are often familiar with children's books. Many students have experienced study break activities and can contribute personal experiences in ways they can't necessarily contribute to conversations like driving directions on campus or for what to use the Bloomberg terminals. The process of executing study break activities reinforced how important they were to our library staff and ways they could contribute beyond shelving books or staffing the circulation desk.

This project was also a successful partnership opportunity. The Education Library, located in a different part of campus, was not an explicit business library partner before. This project highlighted their collections and also led to a second book display collaboration for Earth Day.

Conclusion: What can be learned from this opportunity?

Beyond COVID-19, I do think that study break activities, and specifically children's books, are a great engagement opportunity. It was a low cost for Business/SPEA, and we

References

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