Taking Advantage of Your Friends (of the Library) or How to Extend Library Hours Without a Budget

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The Gerald R. Sherratt Library at Southern Utah University (SUU) is typically open 96 hours per week.

Our student populations have repeatedly requested extended hours, especially towards the end of each semester.

Like most libraries with limited staffing & shrinking budgets, ours could not accommodate these requests.

However, we maintain an active, responsive Friends of the Library (FOL) group....
After years of unsuccessfully trying to acquire additional funds and personnel, we began to examine creative approaches. We considered looking beyond our staffing issues and library budgets. During fall semester 2016 our FOL group was made aware of the requests for extended hours. In addition, the SUU Student Association (SUUSA) was made alerted to the situation and agreed to also provide assistance.
We decided to extend library hours at the most critical/busy times: just before and during final exams.

The schedule of extended hours includes keeping the library open until 12:00 a.m. (on Sundays) or 2:00 a.m. (Monday-Thursday).

Both the FOL and SUUSA groups agreed to assist with the endeavor, provided that support was made available to them.

Volunteers were assigned to staff the library’s Checkout Desk.
All volunteers were invited to attend a training session prior to working their assigned shift(s).

Recalling the various details of the work proved problematic for our volunteers, therefore a brief guidebook was created to explain each task a volunteer might likely encounter.

As problems arose, extra training was offered and a new, streamlined guidebook was created to assist volunteers.

Support for the Endeavor
Guidebooks for Extended Hours

- The guidebook was emailed to each volunteer and a hard copy was printed to provide a reference at the Check Out desk.
- The initial guidebook included a guide to scanners, directions for item checkin/checkout, catalog search instructions, lost & found procedures, and a checklist for closing the library (10 pages total).
- The updated guidebook contains rules regarding patron headcount checks as well as a list of closing procedures (2 pages total).
The library witnessed an average attendance of 45-62 students present in the building during extended hours.

Library patrons were originally able to checkin and checkout materials during the extended hours.

The library was able to present these increased services without any direct, additional costs.

An enormous amount of goodwill was engendered via our offering of extended hours.
Qualitative Evidence via Survey

- How many times did users visit?
- Did user come with friends?
- Were there other users around?
- Were users able to be productive?
- Would this influence users’ choice to return/stay in school?
- Additional comments revealed...users were generally appreciative
Other Issues the Survey Revealed

- Extend hours during finals week
- Have the computer lab open 24/7
- Open the Café longer too
- Offer extended hours on weekends
- Make extended hours permanent
- Enough activity for the cost?
- The changes in times were somewhat confusing to patrons
Challenges

- The effort required to create a guidebook, as well as adequately train volunteers, was considerable.
- Despite the support offered, volunteers continued to struggle with library procedures.
- In addition, services were curtailed (book checkin & checkout were eventually eliminated) in order to simplify the responsibilities for volunteers.
- Volunteers expressed a desire to have library personnel available as well during extended hours.
Although there were no direct costs to extend library hours, we did realize indirect costs:

- Staff time devoted to creating the guidebook as well as to train the volunteers
- Organizing when volunteers would be slated to work has required significant staff time
- The endeavor has required heavy promotion (from library staff & librarians) in order to alert students to the extended hours
The library was able to provide service and accommodate students without direct cost or significant impact upon budgets and staffing. However...

- training to ensure quality has been difficult
- identifying and keeping volunteers has been a challenge

On the other hand...

- patrons have taken advantage of the extended hours and mostly expressed gratitude
- the library has positively impacted the campus and retention efforts

Things to Consider
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Many thanks for your attendance!