

Building Blocks for Book Displays

Engaging Student Employees

Located on the Harborside Campus of Johnson & Wales University (JWU) in Providence, Rhode Island, Harborside Library provides academic resources, research support, and public service to the campus community. The library serves as a safe, welcoming space where students can comfortably study, collaborate, and receive reference assistance. Research and reference support mostly come in the form of research appointments held in-person or via zoom, virtual Ask a Librarian chat assistance, and Information Literacy Instruction set in the students' classrooms.

Harborside Library's professional staff consists of two librarians: a chief librarian and myself, the reference management librarian. This staff structure became official by the onset of the 2022–2023 academic year following a period of personnel changes. In prior years, the staff had been composed of three full-time librarians.

We anticipated the staff reduction negatively affecting our ability to fulfill every facet of our regular workplace activities. To illustrate, within an academic year, the Harborside Library team typically teaches an average of 50 information literacy instruction classes and meets for about 90 research consultations with students. Simultaneously, we also contribute to library and campus projects, some of which include the creation of book displays.

Over the years, JWU librarians have fully recognized the role of library book displays. In particular, book displays have been viewed as a positive tool to help transform the library into a welcoming and communal space. By arranging a themed sample of library materials, "The library becomes a place to be together and belong to the campus community."¹ As such, the library staff has appreciated the importance of regularly crafting book displays. To compliment the Harborside Campus's culinary focus, library displays have often represented and explored a food history or culinary trend. However, while adjusting to a decreased staff, we foresaw our attention being diverted away from assembling book displays by a heavier schedule of professional reference duties. Consequently, I decided to transfer the monthly book display responsibilities to the library's team of thirteen student assistants in my role as the primary supervisor of Harborside Library's student employees.

Electing to assign the student staff with the construction of book displays benefited both the student workers and professional staff. For instance, it not only allowed the librarians to prioritize reference and instruction commitments, but it also helped to encourage positive student employee engagement and workplace interest. Furthermore, the student-led monthly book displays resulted in an organized practice of collaboration and library procedures that served to reinforce and assess the student team's library training and development. This article details the organized activities that transpired after the decision.

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Organizing Book Display Activities

Each month, student employees were expected to craft a library book display after I announced the latest theme. These communications, shared over email, prompted student employees to utilize a shared Google Sheet to mark their names and progress. Consisting of tabs specific to group-based tasks, the Google Sheets were useful in keeping students on target. For example, to organize activities for October 2022's two simultaneous book displays "Halloween Recipes" and "Food as Medicine," the Google Sheet included tabs for the categories Resource Selection: Halloween, Resource Selection: Food as Medicine, Book Processing: OCLC, and Seasonal & Display Decorations. With a total of thirteen student employees on staff, a maximum of four students could volunteer to help complete one categorized duty. See figure 1 for a visual example of this.

Add your name to ONE of the categories below. *Everyone* must make a selection by Thursday 9/29.

Remember: This is a team project 🧑‍🤝‍🧑 Meika will help to guide each group.

Resource Selection: Halloween	Resource Selection: Food as Medicine
1) Christine 2) Nick 3) Eve	1) Gabby 2) Bianca 3) Lucas

Book Processing: OCLC	Seasonal & Display Decorations
1) Nitu 2) Raquel 3) Gina	1) Tee 2) Masha 3) Mejani 4) Elena

Figure 1. Students' task sign-up, JWU Library.

To further support students with their tasks, I regularly checked in with each of them and included written directions on their Google Sheet. At the onset of the pilot project, it was apparent that a successful result depended on organization and proper student training.

Student Training Precedes Book Display Projects

To ensure student workers' preparedness, book display activities commenced after the completion of workplace training and procedural reviews in late September. Since more than half of the student team consisted of new hires in September 2022, this start time proved vital, as it allowed time to fully onboard new employees. At Harborside Library, student assistant training typically involves focused introductions to public service, borrowing services, and collection maintenance, as well as an emphasis on teamwork and the positive role of the library.

Traditionally, after initial workplace training concludes, student assistants' shifts revolve around service desk coverage and collection maintenance (reshelving and shelf reading). However, once the student-created book display projects commenced, assistants had the opportunity to regularly perform additional library practices such as material searches and book processing.

These new procedures were gradually introduced to students from October to December of 2022. During this time span, students were asked to choose one display activity to complete

each month. They could not repeat the same task during the fall semester months. While completing their activities, students recorded their contributions on their designated tab within the team Google Sheet. For instance, the Resource Discovery volunteers added their names, titles of books or magazines, and library call numbers. See figure 2 for a visual example of this.

Halloween Display - Resource Selection		
Theme / Scenario: You're throwing a Halloween party! What kind of recipe books and magazines will help you prep for the fun?		
Group Requirements:		
You must each select at least 4 books/mags to display in the glass case. Add your selections to the table below		
After you complete your list of items... Retrieve them from the stacks. Place them on your designated "Halloween" book cart		
Pro Tips:		
Use the JWU Library Website's BOOK tab to search for books. Filter to "Harborside Library"		
Browse our library's culinary magazines. Look at the October issues		
Selector Name	Title	Call #
Eve	Little Witch's Black Magic Cookbook	tx 652.5 .g568 1972
Eve	The Skeleton at the Feast	GT 4995 .A4 C37 1992
Eve	Halloween Treats	tx 739.2 .h34 m34 1998
Christine	Holiday Home Cooking	TX739 .H653 1986
Christine	Ojakangas' great holiday baking book	TX763 .O33 1994
Christine	The complete holiday cookbook	Missing: TX739 .C573
Christine	Martha Stewart's menus for	TX731 .S733 1994
Nick	Cake Decoration & Sugarcraft magazine	2020 October no. 265
Nick	Spells Halloween	gt 4965 .r35 1999
Nick	Gathering and Celebrations	tx 739 .w64 1996
Nick	Holiday cook book; special foods for all special occasions	Missing: TX739 .H66 1959

Figure 2. Students’ recorded contributions, JWU Library.

Specializing in one unique task each month enabled students to improve their confidence in material searching (using the library catalog to discover library print items and pulling them from the shelves), OCLC Worldshare book processing (changing items’ location from circulating collection to display area), and design skills (creating QR code graphics, eye-catching signage, and assembling the displays in an engaging manner). However, by the spring semester, student assistants were expected to participate in every necessary step from material selection to physical arrangement. As such, the Google Sheets for the spring monthly book displays did not include categorized tasks. Instead, student workers tracked their progress on one shared table.

Assessing and Reinforcing Workplace Lessons

From my perspective as the students’ supervisor, the collaborative book display projects provided me the ability to effectively monitor and reinforce lessons from the student employees’ training. In turn, it was easier to note each assistant’s familiarity and confidence when executing necessary tasks. These performance indicators allowed me to reflect on the students’ workplace training. Such considerations are vital in creating a meaningful experience for student assistants. JWU librarians have always viewed student employees as our indispensable frontline workers who have elected to work at the library. Therefore “it is our responsibility as librarians to make sure this time is well spent in further developing

the student as a whole.”² Historically, library employment has granted students soft skills in interpersonal communication, which exists as just one aspect of workplace training. However, the library book displays encouraged students to demonstrate other aspects of library orientation including collection maintenance, research, teamwork, visual design, and organization.

Aligned with the student team’s library onboarding, the book displays benefitted three workplace knowledge areas: resource discovery, OCLC familiarity, and technology skills. Successful completion of the tasks required a demonstration of more sophisticated skills, which included the use of advanced keywords and filters in catalog searches, understanding items’ record pages, exploring physical bookshelves and print journal boxes, and inputting information on a shared spreadsheet. Considering that students’ daily work responsibilities typically do not extend past patron interactions involving basic material searches, book checkouts, printer assistance, and campus referrals, the advanced activities described would rarely have been employed if not for the monthly library displays.

Additionally, the book display projects revealed gaps in the student team’s library knowledge, which encouraged the need for continued library lessons. This realization occurred while monitoring the team’s progress on the shared spreadsheet. For instance, I noticed pauses in progress, particularly within the Resource Discovery categories. During check-ins, these students expressed a concern that the library’s collection did not have enough materials related to a monthly theme. They mentioned that their catalog searches had returned an insufficient number of results. Therefore I showed them how to develop synonyms for keywords in searches. To illustrate, after having originally experienced slim results in preparation of February’s Black Culinary History book display, the student team learned to construct a dynamic list of subject terms and synonyms, which included African diaspora, southern food culture, soul food, black chefs, etc. After listing these terms on the shared spreadsheet and utilizing them in library catalog searches, the students noted the increase in search results. See figure 3 for a visual example of this.

The project activities naturally inspired an introduction to additional OCLC functions, namely the Discover Items tool. The student team had the chance to witness exactly how the library’s public-facing catalog directly reflects library items’ OCLC record pages. As such, the team better understood the importance of setting each display item’s temporary location as “Harborside Display Area.”

Moreover, activities afforded students with greater familiarity of the library’s physical collection and quality collection maintenance. For example, as they made regular visits to the shelves, they had the opportunity to browse the materials and consider subject groupings and cross-references. They also realized that locating library print materials depends on consistent adherence to proper shelving procedures. Consequently, students learned to mark items as missing on OCLC when they were not found on the physical shelves.

This student-led book display project has become a workplace staple since its initial pilot during the 2022–2023 academic year. It has proven effective in furthering student employees’ familiarity with library practices. However, it has unexpectedly shown to benefit students’ technology skills, since it requires them to engage with online tools such as Google Sheets, QR Code generators, and graphic design websites. Furthermore, aside from improving students’ varied skills, the book display tasks also provide insight into individual employee’s work ethic.

Black Culinary History Month

Searching tips:

Select "Books" tab on Library website
On search results page, filter to "Harborside Library"

Search Term Suggestions:

African American cooking, African American cuisine,
Afro-Caribbean cuisine, African diaspora,
Southern food culture, soul food,
black chefs/cooks, black culinary history, black food,
James Hemings, Edna Lewis, Marcus Samuelsson

OCLC Processing:

Each book's item location must be changed on OCLC before being placed on display

Steps:

- 1) Click "Discover Items" on OCLC
- 2) Scan book barcode
- 3) Click "edit" after book record appears
- 4) Keep **permanent** location as "Circulation"
- 5) Change **temporary** location to "Harborside Display"
- 6) Place book on the back counter (in front of Meika's office)

Your Name	Book Title	Call Number	OCLC Processed? Y/N
Tee	The rise : Black cooks and the soul of American food	TX715.2.A47 S26 2020	Y
Tee	Black food : stories, art & recipes from across the African diaspora	GT2853.U5 B59 2021	Y
Gabby	Between Harlem and Heaven: Afro-Asian-American Cooking for Big Nights, Weeknights, and Everyday	TX 715.2 .A47 J64 2018	Y
Gabby	The Cooking Gene	E 185.89.F66 T95 2017	Y
Eve	Afro-vegan : farm-fresh African, Caribbean & Southern flavors remixed	TX837 .T4337 2014	Y
Eve	Soul food love : healthy recipes inspired by one hundred years of cooking in a black family	TX715 .R2136 2015	Y
Christine	New soul cooking: updating a cuisine rich in flavor and tradition	TX715 .H733 2003	Y
Christine	Soul food : the surprising story of an American cuisine, one plate at a time	TX715.2.A47 M55 2013	Y
Raquel	Jerk from Jamaica: Babecue Caribbeans style	TX716.J27 W55 2007	Y
Raquel	Southern Belly: the ultimate food lover's companion to the South	TX357 .E34 2000	Y
Nick	African American Foodways: Explorations of History & Culture	TX715.A2428 2007	Y
Nick	The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks	TX715.2A47T57 2015	Y
Masha	Soul and spice : African cooking in the Americas	TX715 .W587 1998	Y
Masha	My America: recipes from a young Black chef	TX715.2.A47 O59 2022	Y
Josh	The Edna Lewis Cookbook	TX715 .L6683 1972	Y
Josh	New American Table	TX715 .S14523 2009	Y
Josh	Watermelon & Red Birds: a Cookbook for Juneteenth and Black Celebrations	TX 715.2 .A47 T39 2022	Y
Aurora	Between Harlem and Heaven: Afro-Asian-American Cooking for Big Nights, Weeknights, and Everyday	TX 715.2 .A47 J64 2018	Y
Aurora	Kwanzaa: An African-American celebration of culture and cooking	TX 715 .C7865 1991	Y
Elena	Southern Sideboards	TX .S683 1978	Y
Elena	A Taste of Haiti	TX716.H3 Y876 2004	Y
Nitu	the African Cook Book	TX725 .A4 S28 1993	Y
Ntiu	Illustrated Honoring the Iconic and the Unseen Black History	E 185.96.M44 2022	Y

Figure 3. Students' progress and guidance, JWU Library.

Checking Students' Progress and Work Performance

This team project helped to highlight individual students' work ethic. This mainly related to the level of initiative students took with tasks. For example, some students contributed to the project immediately while others required regular reminders in-person and over email. At times, my check-ins with the students confirmed that these pauses in progress were not due to any confusion related to library procedures. Instead, certain students communicated that their progress was delayed because they chose to complete personal studies ahead of library duties while at work. These situations sparked conversations about workplace priorities and expectations, but for the most part, student assistants made positive contributions to the monthly book displays, individually and as a team.

In the end, the Harborside Library student assistants created nine of 12 book displays during the 2022–2023 academic year. Some months included more than one themed display at a time. I independently designed three of the book displays during the Summer New



Figure 4. Black culinary history book display, JWU Library. Photo by author.



Figure 5. National garden month book display, JWU Library. Photo by author.

Student Orientation, Winter Break, and Spring Break, when student employees were not present. I viewed the new student team initiative as a success. Visual examples of the team's book display creations are included in figures 4 and 5.

Conclusion

Student-created monthly book displays have continued since the initial pilot. The project remains useful in promoting teamwork among student employees while deepening their

understanding of library procedures and their role in creating a welcoming space for patrons. In the future, I hope to encourage additional student employee contributions. These contributions may include further involvement in crafting each monthly display theme or identifying campus interests that the library can support, such as the impact of nutrition on academic performance.

From a librarian perspective, the team-based project helps to alleviate some of the negative effects of limited professional staffing. In this regard, librarians do not have to sacrifice the positive impact of visually engaging and informative book displays. Instead, they can focus on more pressing responsibilities such as information literacy instruction, research services, subject liaison work, etc. In conclusion, the student team book display project produced several benefits including the reinforcement of library lessons, collaboration, and a greater sense of workplace purpose among the library student staff. ♪

Notes

1. K. Cardoso and A. Russo, “Inviting People In: Participatory Displays in the Library,” *College & Research Libraries News* 79, no. 3 (2018): 122, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.79.3.122>.
2. A. Melilli, R. Mitola, and A. Hunsaker, “Contributing to the Library Student Employee Experience: Perceptions of a Student Development Program,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 42, no. 4 (2016): 430–37, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2016.04.005>.