Supporting the Public's Right to Know: Engaging Users in Government Information at Florida State University – Transcript of audio

Please stand by for realtime captions.

Good afternoon. Welcome to today's webinar. We will be getting started in about 10 minutes.

Good afternoon. Welcome to today's webinar, Supporting the Public's Right to Know: Engaging Users in Government Information . We will be getting started in five minutes.

Good afternoon. Welcome to today's webinar, "Supporting the Public's Right to Know: Engaging Users in Government Information" at Florida State library. Are presented today is Mohamed Berray , the coordinator for government information and subject specialist for Public administration and policy at Florida State University and holds a Masters degree in political science and Library and information studies Mohamed Berray is a graduate of the Harvard leadership Institute for academic librarians . Mohamed, it is all yours .

Hello. Thank you and welcome to this presentation about outreach and engagement for government information at Florida State University . I do have some introductions lines about introducing who we are, but I will be brief with these in order to focus on the main theme of the presentation. Please ask questions and the chat and we look at to them at the end of the presentation. Very quickly, FSU library serves as a depository for the United States federal government, the state of Florida, and the United Nations. Without going into a lot of details about the federal depository, I know I am preaching to the choir here. Florida State University was designated as the federal library in 1941, allowing the FSU libraries to provide access to tangible and online publications not only to the FSU community but the Tallahassee community as a whole. FSU library is also a state of Florida depository designation that we have had since 1967. The collection and retention of some of the publications goes all of the way back to the very first legislative session in 1845, was called at the time for an executive library to collect books in the state of Florida. The current expansion of the state of Florida depository as we know it today was initiated by the Florida Library Association and established in 1967 by the Florida legislature. Since then, the state of Florida documents programs requiring all state agencies that publish studies and materials to deposit those publications with the division of Library and information services for distribution to designated depository library . That is the entity that we work with for Aristide depository collection. That program itself was renamed the state publications program in 2015.

That same year, in 1967, also FSU gained the United Nations depository status and as you all know the United Nations depository library program is governed by the United Nations forward and that board approved the designation of the new depository libraries upon recommendation from the United Nations library. In short, those are our three collections that we work with. The reason why I included these was not only to introduce our services but to to know how this shaped the mission of depository services at FSU.

So as a depository library we support the public's right to know about these government entities and to provide free public access to the publications, which is really what this presentation is about. More specifically, collection support excellence in research and instruction across all disciplines at FSU . Specifically on the last point, I thought about adding this because it really has proven to be valuable for us. The instruction and research has served as a really good outreach of community not only to deliver

services but to build relationships and collaborate with students and faculty for our design of future services. Our workshop is also open to the public and they are utilized a lot by the Tallahassee community, including public libraries and other libraries in Tallahassee.

The government information unit and the social sciences and humanities department, it consists of myself, a collections and government information specialist or associate. We also have a collection access and a number of federal work-study students, depending upon the workload that we have for that semester. And all library employees, really. I will talk about this later. This is to encourage collaboration across the educational plane in and out of the library and for me to share some ways that we at FSU have done this . Outreach supports our work in many different ways. The most important for us is that it really informs our constituencies about our collections and the services that we provide. More importantly, their rights on the public law to access our collections and services. It has enabled us to reach an audience outside of specific compass and also to seek feedback about usernames that we've been used to improve our services and maintain a vibrant collection. Most importantly, and this has proven to be beneficial for us is that it leads to collaboration with units in the library and on campus. In our case, just to name a few, our marketing department has designed our outreach materials, including customizing the once we get from GPO and also through the social media platforms getting the word out. To be honest, or outreach activities would not have been possible without our marketing department.

Our web development team has also proven to be really helpful in designing web pages. There really is always learning opportunities in these endeavors. I can only speak for myself, but I have learned a lot about marketing and web design concepts that inform some of the with that I think about outreach, using library websites and all social media. Lastly, I wanted to briefly mention her teaching, learning, and engagement department that has also participated in outreach activities. In fact, this department has three people dedicated to outreach. There is the student engagement librarian, a student engagement specialist, and a student engagement associate. They have all been involved in one way or another in every single government information outreach activity that we have had. This is what I meant when I put all library employees earlier. When we are at the upmost capacity in terms of the services that we provide, many units in the library have to collaborate to help us to get to where we want to be. We welcome this because it really makes up for the lack of dedicated government information staff for libraries that do not have it.

Lastly, outreach has been really useful in helping us to gain visibility on campus, which also makes the case easy for library administration to advocate for sustaining their services and also was the way that we had a staff dedicated to government information. With that being said, there are many outreach activities that we are involved in. I will run through some of the major ones that might be things that you are already doing right now the first is resource of material display you can see in the slide FSU libraries have a dedicated space dedicated to government information displays. We have used that space for monthly and sometimes weekly displays on topics of themes of interest to the FSU community . Summer also requested from the public and from registered student organizations interested as it relates to their work on campus. Sometimes we just do it for fun. I mean this sincerely. For example, for animal welfare day, we highlighted the animal welfare act that was signed into law in August 1966. What we did was we requested portals of all library employee pets. The results were astounding. People dressed up their pets. Some people have their dog in a drivers seat. It was a show that we took all of those pictures and put them on the display wall. It was really popular. And from our experience, they can be varied. We have had a lot of fun with that flexibility and variability in the topics that we choose for our display. Here are some examples of our display team. Women's history month, Hispanic Heritage month, Native

American Heritage month, Asian Pacific American Heritage month, constitution day, the Fourth of July, freedom of information date. That is my favorite because it is the day after my birthday. We also did the UFO display following the defense intelligence report on UFOs and that was really popular with the FSU community. We also did a love your government data week. It is the opportunity to work with different librarians to do outreach about government data in ways that we have not done before with also done a display on the United States foreign relations. We did a display on the new Census and the National Park Service is also another very popular one . Most recently last week we did a display on international human rights day, for which we relied heavily on the United Nations collections for that one was just a short list of some of the displays that we have done so far, just to give you an idea of what motivates our experience in electronic display.

I must point out that our displays are not done in isolation of our general collection. We usually look at government publications for these displays with general collection items to help to provide a balanced representation of the subject as well as context for what we are celebrating. For example, for Hispanic heritage month we had popular literature collection by Hispanic authors and about Hispanic history and culture alongside federal declarations and publications on this topic. Before we had a website dedicated to government information, our displays were accompanied by a QR code that then linked to the electronic version of that item, if we had it electronically. And so other relevant electronic resources are in our collection. When we went to only online instructions because of the pandemic, we also clicked on the print display and visual display on our website. It has really helped us integrate multimedia objects into our displays. Also in ways that we have not done in the past the one thing that we do, whenever we have a display, as we usually accompany that display with an engagement board that six patrons seeks patrons feedback on the display. For example, for constitution day, which is what you see right now, we asked patrons how they enjoy their constitutional rights. We keep our engagement questions open-ended not to limit responses. This activity, we also handed out free copies of the pocket constitution and also a summary of the amendments . Students were very candid in their feedback and responded to other comments. We have students respond to other students, and then they would come back and see if somebody else has responded to their comment. We had like a miniature engagement on the engagement board and we gathered very valuable feedback through that that we then used to access and identify interest areas to plan for future events.

FSU libraries government information website is really our main platform for outreach about our collections and services. Our website just changed. Most of this content has now moved. With this recent content migration, our website still includes information about our three depository collections . It has a full listing of our services and information about what government information is and how it can be used. Our website also links to the guide for the three depository collections . It has proven to be a really good outreach for the work that we do. I included this in the slide not only because it has worked for us, but it is something that I really recommend for the depository library that does not have a section of the website dedicated to government information, if and when this is possible for other libraries to do .

We advertise some of this content to our users. We have used various social media platforms. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, to promote our activities. This is all really thanks to our marketing department and the library, who are very timely and creative with the design of images for the social media platforms the way this has worked for us is we either write the language and give it to them and say, this is the sequence of the post that we would like on these days at these times for these events. And they will do it. But other times, they will also let us do like a twitter take over. In instances where students are asked engagement questions through Twitter, and we are expected to respond to them in return.

We have tweeted ourselves, but many times I just give the content to the marketing department, who then send it out.

Our blog posts have been mainly used for events maintaining outreach and some examples of these with the outreach include love your federal depository week, love your data week, the depository anniversary. One is coming up in February next year. Like the one on the slide, which was about Jewish American Heritage Month, this is a really cool way to get the word out. The continue to provide answers and relevant information that is intended moving forward for changing student populations as well. We have used our blogs for displays that need to be flushed out to provide additional context and as a means of bridging those who cannot come to the library to view our physical display. They can be very demanding to write blog posts almost every month and sometimes every two weeks they have proven to work well for us. And other methods that we use to get the word out about our collections and services and activities, really, is the signage in the library. This might sound simple, but it is something that has proven good at FSU this includes things like outreach about workshops, public speaking events, like we did for constitution day when we invited a professor from the FSU law school to deliver a lecture about the United States Constitution . All of that was primarily advertised on the digital screen. These digital screens are positioned in multiple floors in the library and more recently feel so started utilizing background images for our library computers. I am just going to throw this out there that this also helps to reduce the amount of paper that we use for fliers. It is also complimented other outreach methods . Using this screen has also provided opportunities to us to work with RIT department. It does take time to plan that, but is really helped us to get the word out. Many times the marketing department uses the same materials created for the website on our research screen so visitors can relate what they see inside the library to what they see on social media. Another really cool outreach and engagement activity frequently used is the tabling events. Tabling events are a great way to interact with patrons and talk to them about their individual research and information needs. We use visual materials and hands-on activities to engage patrons. We have used NASA puzzles and civics flashcards as a means of engagement . There is multiple activities that we could have, but we try as we can to primarily use stuff that we get from GPO we also do give out some library swag . Just like our displays, we also have an engagement board at our events. That is a picture of me and our government information associate at constitution day. This was held at the entrance of the main library at FSU .

Lastly, it is the research guide. They focus on providing guidance related to use of government information. Research guidance have been crucial to curating our electronic government information by agency and subject, making it easy to spotlight materials used for our displays. It also makes it easy to reuse display objects when the day reoccurs. The guide also includes search strategies for government information. From experience, having these methods of identifying government information in our collection and on the web has generally led to an increase in use of our collections. FSU is signed up for the GPO and hissing that a huge chunk of our use for electronic government information also comes from our guide. They have not just been used to deliver direct services when needed, but is also proven to mesh really well with other outreach activities that we have, including our displays.

Some key takeaways from this presentation are the successful outreach has helped us to reach wider audiences on campus and in the Tallahassee community in ways that we otherwise would not come if we had not done some of these strategies. It has helped us to gain valuable insight about campus needs and future outreach activities, and outreach and engagement has also enhanced collaboration within the library and on campus. It increases visibility on campus. That has made it easier to make a case for administration support when needed and the outreach work has also helped in the campus curriculum. On this point, this is really the feedback that we have received a lot from faculty in different

departments about how relevant our government collection has been to their classes. We really see it is very integral to campus instruction. More importantly, it informs the public, which is what this presentation has been all about.

So that is everything that I have for now. I am happy to take questions, and I'm going to send it back to you, Ashley and Kathy.

Thank you , Mohamed but we do have one question. Do the digital signs actually get viewed? We find most of our students ignore all signage.

They do get used. There is no way that I would know that but they are positioned in the library in such a way that they are very hard to miss. You see them immediately. You walk into the library, and they are positioned in all of the public spaces that we have on multiple floors. There is no way we could really keep track of who sees our digital displays. The one thing that is usually distracting, even to me, is having a rotating display because somebody can walk in and by the time they finish reading something on the screen, it goes away and something else comes up. We try to suggest some timing for how long a specific display can be up before it is changed to something different. I really assume that they see them a lot. I give an example about our Constitution day lecture and workshops. We do handout fliers, but we have primarily relied on data displays for those. Those are very well attended . I assume that people see them.

Okay. We have another question. I have a similar question about your exhibits. How do you attract students to examine what is on an exhibit?

The biggest tip that I have for this is the subject. Let the subject speak for itself. We do put out displays without request, but half of the time our displays are requested, either from faculty in the department or from the public or firm registered student organizations. They have helped to get the word out about the topic that we have on display and also the materials that we have on display. Every display that we have had on the national team has also been tweeted on all of the social media platforms that are managed by the marketing department. We do attract students in some ways I making sure that it is relevant, it meets their need, the request is coming directly from them and not necessarily assumed for them, and every once in a while select for Constitution day for example, we do handout a lot of swag. That brings students to the table and to our display wall that we had for Constitution day. For other events like for example Love your Data Week, we took over twitter and we ask engagement questions and made sure that they used our display material in getting help to answer those questions. We gave out prizes to those who answered directly. Some sort of engagement has also proven helpful in attracting students. They go back and forth so they see something and then give a comment on the engagement board and then they come back to see if somebody else has commented on their response to the engagement question that also helps us to get the word out. I really would not point to one specific thing that attracts students. Everything that we do in conjunction with our display has worked well in bringing them to see us.

Okay. Can you tell us a little bit more about how you used the UFO theme? I think that is such a cool idea .

It is a cool idea because I am a believer and I'm not going to spend time on that, but there is so much casual staff on campus about UFOs and even in the libraries . One of the defense intelligence reports commit and you could sense from the conversation on campus leading to that report to be published

about interest in the subject. We had the marketing department make a banner about it but we put out every single publication that we could lay our hands on really on identified unidentified flying objects but that was really just for the fun aspect. We try to make this relatable as best as we can. There is no doubt that the work of government leads to a lot of conversations and discussion on campus. We try to capitalize on that whatever conversational interest in a particular topic is happening at this time on campus, then we capitalize on that and we do a display on it and UFOs was one of them. I am more than happy to look for the guide that currently has all of the materials that we put out for the UFO displays , and I can share that in some form maybe when the recording of this webinar is being handed out.

Okay. You might have talked about this, but do you visit local public libraries?

So the library here in Tallahassee, which is a public library, manages the state depository collection and also serves as a federal depository for very little collection so we collect more we visited them. We have not had a lot of activities that we host together. This is something that I have been thinking about a lot. I think that there are many opportunities for us to engage with them. We have invited all public libraries for the celebration and then are recognized for that so FSU libraries we met and we have not really done a lot of activities together in terms of the outreach and engagement activities that we have talked about so far. This something that I look forward to doing only that but schools because we do get debate topics from GPO. I have always wondered like what can our role at the depository library and as a public institution in collaboration with schools and public libraries that find our services and collection useful. Thank you for that question. That is a really good question. That has been the extent of our engagement with public libraries so far .

Okay. For the moment, that is the last question. We still have plenty of time for more if anyone has a question that they would like to ask Mohamed . Go ahead and chat it in. Ashley has just pushed out the link to our survey we would really appreciate if you would fill that out for us. Feel free to add any topics that you would like to see covered in the Academy webinars. Okay. We have another question. What display seems to have garnered the most interest?

Probably Constitution day, just because not only is it a national theme, but we have also involved FSU faculty in the conversation . There is a class on the United States Constitution that is being taught in the law department here on campus. They send students out to these events and also our board that we had for Constitution day was also the most popular in terms of the feedback that we gathered on that engagement board. Have to say this is a low hanging fruit just because Constitution day starts with an event and the materials that we get from GPO make it so easy so again we provided summary amendments and pocket constitutions for these. We have a lot of GPO swag that we request every year for Constitution day . People dress up the library in different colors. It has been very useful based on the subject and timeliness of it. Otherwise I really do not want to underestimate everything else that we have put on display. Women's history month was a really good one. Every now and then we do think about pretty strange things, like the first 100 days in office. Every new government talks about things that they have accomplished in the first 100 days. What we did for this exhibit was we collected major bills and executive orders that were signed in the first 100 days of previous regimes and put all of that together in a display. This was one of the really popular ones and it is to integrate man collection items. I made reference to Hispanic heritage month. For that collection we worked a lot with our Hispanic faculty organization on campus. They were the ones that also helped us to selects material from popular Hispanic authors. That one was pretty popular with students.

Okay. Next question. How do you collect feedback from students and professors?

And by feedback, we do not really have feedback forms that we sent out. The engagement board has been our popular feedback that we get from patrons. The one thing that we do this we host a lot of tabling events in multiple locations on campus inside the library and outside as well. FSU is the same market Wednesdays when all of the student organizations promote activities on campus. We have a tent and that's location just to promote government information research. We collect feedback from students who stop by. Most of the feedback collected has been through our engagement board and interactions with students when we do tabling events but also through the classroom instruction and research consultation . That was something that I made reference to earlier in one of these slides because outreach and instruction is been a really good way for us to gather feedback and promote activities as well.

I think this is a follow-up. How much time do you designee to put in these displays together? They are incredible.

Thank you. We have utilized the help of federal work-study students . It can be a lot of work, but like I mentioned earlier, some of these can be reused. That is one of the reasons why we curate the collections that we put up for display. Things like Constitution day, for example, that I've talked about quite a bit, some of those materials can be reused year after year. That really reduces the amount of workload. The measured workload that myself and the collections and government information associates do is select the materials and making sure that they are relevant and that they can be put up on display. With that being said, once we are done with that part, then we recruit a collections access and the federal work-study students to pull all of these materials out and put them on display and have utilized the marketing department quite a bit and they are on the website before we move them and we also use our web development team and this method is not being used anymore, but FSU has a system and it is on this is on the public portals. We use a system like that to upload outreach and display materials on the web. We can do it, and we have done it ourselves so many times, but sometimes we do recruit others. To have everyone really work together reduces the workload. It is a lot of work the first few times that you do it, but once you get a hang of it it becomes a little bit more manageable to do paragraph have to say the circumstances worked a little bit in our favor when we went electronic without displays during COVID because it reduced that workload of having to look for things and making sure that they were on the shelf not checked out before anybody else checked them out. Overall, it can be a lot of work initially, but if you recruit a lot of help from different students in the library, it is manageable. That is what we have done.

Okay. I think this refers back to the feedback. Do you use surveys or other formats?

No. We have already used surveys and now that this question has been asked, it makes me wonder why we haven't used it because we assess our instruction quite a bit and we use surveys for that but we haven't really used surveys for this, for feedback for government information services here on campus. We could develop a survey and then attach that somewhere on our web page, but because we serve such a varied group of people, we really do not know how that would reach everyone. For classroom instruction, for example, we leave a couple minutes at the end of class and say can you please click on this link and fill out the survey? Considering that we serve the public students and sometimes we provide services over the phone, for example, and by email, I haven't really used surveys a lot. This is something I will think about after this presentation. I think we should, just to expand the scope of not only the feedback that we get about how we are doing but how we provide opportunities for everyone to engage and provide recommendations for what we should be doing. Thank you for that.

We have a comment here I would love to have your teams to be able to do this type of outreach and display exhibits you guys do a great job.

Thank you .

Okay. We still have a few minutes left if anybody else has any questions?

This is been really amazing so far just talking to you all and getting questions. If there is really not any further questions, I would love to know what Efren else is doing so that I can learn as well and get feedback as well about if there is any way we can improve what we are currently doing.

Okay. I'm going to put in the survey link one more time. Okay. You got it twice. Once for me and ones from Ashley. Okay. Since it doesn't look like we have anymore comments, I am going to wrap this up. I would like to thank Mohamed for the wonderful webinar and everyone who attended and wish everyone a happy and a safe holiday season.

Thank you. Thank you so much for the opportunity. Happy holidays to you all.