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# What's Brewing? An Outreach Event with Beer

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# What's Brewing? An Outreach Event with Beer

By Katy Kelly, University of Dayton

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Katy Kelly is communications and outreach librarian/assistant professor at University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio. She promotes library services and resources by planning, developing, and assessing programs and activities. She manages Roesch Library's social media accounts and chairs the Libraries Marketing and Outreach Team. She also provides reference, instruction, and collection development support. She is a blogger for the American Library Association's ProgrammingLibrarian.org.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, libraries have used creative ways to invite current and potential users to their spaces and services. Inspired by our library's role in supporting faculty, staff, and students, Roesch Library at the University of Dayton hosted a free open house-style event targeted to university faculty and staff featuring local craft beer offerings selected by a faculty member well-versed in the brewing arts.

"What's Brewing at Roesch Library?" was a social event that offered good, free beer on the day grades were due: It was the perfect recipe. Personal email invitations to faculty and staff promising free beer and the opportunity to socialize drew a large crowd at the library to experience the newly renovated first floor and also learn about collections and services.

## ORIGINS

At a winter collection development meeting, liaison librarians discussed ways to reach teaching faculty. In previous years, the library had hosted a wine and cheese reception, targeted to new faculty, as the primary faculty outreach event. The liaison librarians wanted to do something novel and expand outreach beyond the faculty to include staff, who can also be critical champions of the library<sup>1</sup>. However, instead of serving wine and cheese, the librarians decided to draw upon the surging appeal of locally brewed craft beer. The Dayton region has recently experienced a revival of its local brewing industry, reflecting a national trend, and many local breweries are owned by University of Dayton alumni<sup>2</sup>. The local brewers' connections to the university and the community pride in the local craft beer scene made beer an attractive choice for this event.

An event like this was timely in other ways as well. Over the course of the previous summer, the university renovated the library's first floor, introducing new spaces, technology, and services. One of these services is the Knowledge Hub, a one-stop center for research and writing help offered by the librarians (research) and student peer consultants (writing). Additionally, an entire room previously occupied by government documents had been transformed into a flexible, interactive, technology-

enabled classroom now known as the Collab. If campus had not seen our renovations yet, this event would surely encourage them to come check it out.

## THE RECIPE

It was important for us to maintain an air of sophistication for the event. A professor in the English department, Dr. Thomas Morgan, is a home brewer and beer connoisseur. Dr. Morgan enthusiastically agreed to be our beer expert and selected four local beers to feature: Eudora Brewing Company's German Wheat; Yellow Springs Brewery's Zoetic, a pale ale; Warped Wing Brewery's Barn Gang, a saison; and Fifth Street Brewpub's Ice Breaker IPA, an India pale ale. Each beer had prominent signage including brewery information, beer type, and taste description.

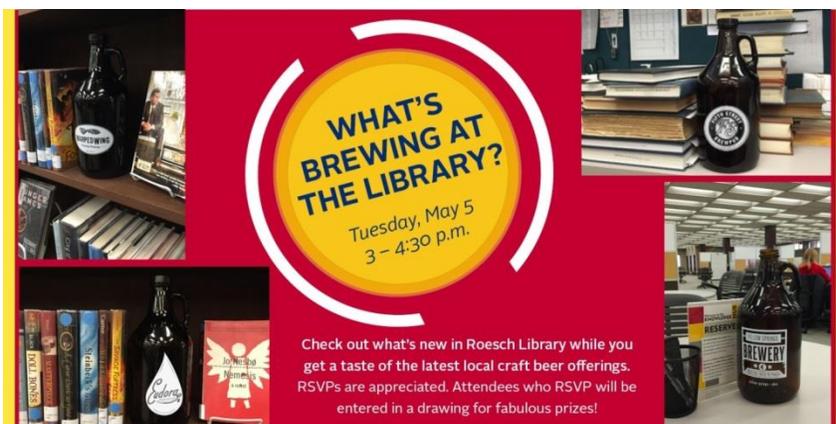
A planning committee organized logistics and chose what services and collections to highlight. Staff members who volunteered to represent a service or collection were nicknamed "table masters" and were in charge of coordinating a station and providing key points for the signage. The library-centric stations included the Knowledge Hub, our research and writing help service point; our leisure reading collection and tablets; Archives and Special Collections; and eCommons, our institutional repository.

One goal of the planning committee was to limit print materials. It is a habit of ours to create handouts or fliers, and we hypothesized a direct relationship between the number of handouts and the number of spills. We opted not to put this to the test, rather challenging each other to find creative ways to avoid handing out paper. For example, at the Knowledge Hub station, we collected emails to send out an electronic version of the syllabus statement promoting the services.

## PROMOTION

What's Brewing was only open to current faculty and staff, so we had to communicate strategically. We asked library faculty and staff to sign up to contact department leaders directly, partly to personalize the invitation, but also to ensure that all departments were invited. The intent was for every department head to receive an invitation from someone with whom he or she was familiar in the library. We

provided [a PDF flier](#)<sup>3</sup>, sample invitation text, and a link to the RSVP form.



In the marketing materials, RSVPs were "appreciated but not required," but all attendees who responded were automatically entered to win one of two gift baskets from local breweries. This incentive worked, as many people asked about

the door prizes upon entry. Out of 240 RSVPs, 220 faculty and staff attended. According to the university's executive director of events, a no-show rate of 10 percent is typical for successful RSVP events; the rate was only 8 percent for What's Brewing.

Using a Google Form for RSVPs, we asked if there was "anything specific you would like to know about University Libraries." The answers provided by respondents proved to be both informative and occasionally surprising. Two staff members specifically asked about the process for checking out books and several said they didn't know staff had library privileges. Other questions included where to find business research resources, what staff perks are available, and what spaces are available for meetings. The RSVP form results were shared with library staff so other questions could be answered via email or in person at the event.



Using the email addresses compiled from the RSVP form, a reminder email was sent prior to the event. This email reminded people to bring their university ID card so we could verify their faculty or staff status. Since this event was open to current university faculty and staff only, we did not use our social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to promote the event.

Prior to What's Brewing, all library employees received the space layout and RSVP list. This way, library staff knew what to expect and who was planning on attending the event. In this case, the more information the better, so all library staff could feel confident about participating in and promoting the event.

## TASTING

The day of the event, setup went smoothly, and attendees arrived promptly at the 3:00 p.m. start time. At the entrance of the event, we swiped university IDs using a card swiper from our circulation desk that fed ID numbers automatically into a Google Spreadsheet. After the event, the director of institutional reporting provided collective data about the attendees.

Upon entry, attendees were given one four-ounce glass that could be rinsed out at rinsing stations between tastes. The beer stations were situated between the library information tables so attendees could interact with both types of stations equally. University Catering provided the beer tables, supplies,

and trained bartenders. Library table masters coordinated with other staff members to greet people and answer questions at the stations.

At the Knowledge Hub station, attendees learned about the newly combined service point for research and writing help. The leisure reading station featured our new Kindles and tablet computers available for borrowing as well as selections from our popular leisure reading collection. Further down the line was our button maker, where attendees could learn how to make a button or magnet with a historical image from Archives and Special Collections. By the end of the event, approximately 200 people made a magnet or button. The Marian Library, University Archives and Special Collections, and U.S. Catholic Special Collection station showcased rare materials in a case as well as archival documents and artifacts that attendees could handle. A laptop hooked up to one of our screens showcased our digital collections.

In our new classroom space, the Collab, we wanted to promote the availability of the space for meetings and events. One large screen gave information on how to reserve the space, and attendees captured the information using their smartphone cameras. In the Collab, we also showcased eCommons, our institutional repository. The eScholarship and communications manager was on hand to demonstrate eCommons and SelectedWorks, a new faculty research profile feature. The fourth beer station was also in the Collab to ensure that people would travel back to the space.

Attendees noshed on bar food snacks such as spinach dip, pretzels, meatballs, and stuffed mushrooms. The event also offered non-alcoholic beverages and hard cider for those looking for gluten-free or non-beer options. The hard cider proved to be a huge hit.

Upon leaving, attendees expressed positive feedback about the event. Many asked — perhaps jokingly, perhaps not — if we were doing it again the next week. The event was deemed a success based upon the attendee reactions and feedback from library staff. Several people checked out books upon leaving the event.

## **POST-PARTY**

The following day, the planning committee held a debriefing and reviewed the data collected from the IDs. Though our attendance count was 220, we collected swipe data from 190 because some attendees forgot their IDs. Rather than turn them away, we counted them on a tally. Based on the data collected from the card swiping, we were able to tell that the average age of the attendees was 43. The average number of years as a university employee was 8. More than half of all attendees had five years' experience or less at the university. A map<sup>4</sup> of where attendees came from shows that we were successful in attracting people from all over campus.

# University of Dayton



The eCommons/SelectedWorks station was inundated with interested attendees and could have used more liaison librarians to help. The table master for the Special Collections station wanted more people interacting with the collections as opposed to the artifacts protected by a glass case. Attendees even saw the connection between the images on eCommons and those available at the button maker station. The planning committee held fast on not providing paper handouts, but the university archivist did distribute business cards to many attendees.

The table masters all agreed that the event would benefit from increased collaborative planning among library departments. For example, the leisure reading station could be improved by showcasing other interesting items available for borrowing such as headphones and phone chargers. The Archives and Special Collections area could be supplemented with research librarians who could describe curriculum integration for the items in the form of teachable packets. In the future, library staff could sign up for shifts at the various stations so assistance is spread out.

## CONCLUSION

What's Brewing was a success, and many attendees during and after the event asked, "When is the next one?" The planning committee decided that we would like to try it again, keeping in mind our strategic approach for showcasing new services and spaces rather than simply repeating the event because it was successful. Our next event will feature all-new information tables and a new event layout. The library is slated for additional renovations in the coming years, so perhaps even a new space, such as our second

floor or lobby, will be the new venue. In order to keep it fresh, we will select different beers from other local breweries.

The recipe for this event had a winning combination of library staff involvement, an incentive (free local craft beer), and strategic timing. If a beer tasting is totally out of the question for other libraries, perhaps a tasting of other locally created fare would work just as well, such as ice cream, candy, or baked goods. Find out what your community is proud of and use it to promote your library.

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<sup>1</sup> Sue Samson and Kimberly Swanson. "Support Your Staff Employees: They Support the Academy." *Reference Services Review* 42, no. 1: 165-180.

<sup>2</sup> Kristen Wicker. "Pints of Pride," *University of Dayton Magazine*, March 20, 2015, <http://udquickly.udayton.edu/udmagazine/2015/03/pints-of-pride/>

<sup>3</sup> "2015 What's Brewing at the Library?" (2015). *Reports and Promotional Materials*. Paper 20. [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/libraries\\_rpts promo/20](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/libraries_rpts promo/20)

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Lumpkin. "What's Brewing Map with Legend." June 5, 2015.