Going No-Tech, Low-Tech, and High-Tech

Interactive Library Spaces as Passive Outreach

Tammi M. Owens

Tammi M. Owens, *Associate Professor, Outreach and Instruction Librarian UNO Libraries, University of Nebraska at Omaha.*

Correspondence concerning this column should be directed to Nicole Eva and Erin Shea, email: nicole.eva@uleth.ca and eshea@fergusonlibrary.org.

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UNO Libraries supports University of Nebraska at Omaha's mission to transform and improve the quality of life locally, nationally, and globally through shared values of excellence, engagement, inclusion, discovery, integrity, and university spirit. We do this in part through continuous assessment and development of our learning spaces and environments. We make small changes to ensure our students feel safe, welcome, and at home, and come to see us as a trustworthy, surprising, delightful space. These small changes include developing interactive spaces along a technological continuum so everyone can take ownership of the library in some way.

These careful additions to public spaces, I would argue, are passive marketing and outreach. While these spaces don't necessarily always advertise our services or resources, we want students to feel like the library is their space at the university, and interactivity—in most cases, giving students the opportunity to literally make their mark—is one way to accomplish this. A recent study by Priya Mehta and Andrew Cox investigated the qualities of "homeness," or the feeling of being at home, in libraries. In their study, Mehta and Cox found that a significant percentage of students moved furniture, spread their belongings out, and ultimately found an area they considered to be their space. With these acts of appropriation, the students felt more at home in their university library.[1]

When we build passive interactive outreach spaces in the library, we're building relationships and trust. Our unspoken message to our students is, "This is your space." We welcome appropriative actions because we know that when students see themselves in the library they may be more willing to explore, create, and question. They may be more willing to open themselves up to not-knowing and ask questions at our service desks or in consultations with librarians. In this, I agree with David Carr, who writes that "cultural institutions need to inspire trust so the learner can experience risk and yet also experience cognitive change without feeling devastating fear."[2] We are there to support our students during this time of cognitive change, and it's then that our passive outreach turns active as we help our students with the next step in their learning process.

In this column, I will discuss three different types of interactive library spaces that use varying degrees of technology: the no-tech walk to the coffee shop, the low-tech use of whiteboard paint, and the high-tech video wall.

NO-TECH: THE WALK TO THE COFFEE SHOP

For me, a fundamental goal of outreach is to gain the attention and trust of people who wouldn't normally walk into the library or use our resources in person or online. To reach non-users in addition to our regular patrons, I rely on my favorite non-technical library space: the Library Café. Many people, faculty included, see the library as a convenient coffee shop, and I don't begrudge them that opinion—I work with it. The Library Café is located opposite from the main entrance at the other end of our building, and visitors must walk through the entire main floor on their way to get caffeine or lunch and walk back out again. While this walk to and from the café isn't typically known as an interactive space, it is *active*. This traffic pattern is where we position our displays, pop-up art exhibitions, casual furniture groupings, new books, and (especially for those who think libraries are all about books) interactive spaces for people to communicate with us, with each other, or to just play. The walk to the café is social and it changes often. Our most successful outreach events are held along this thoroughfare; events in rooms just a few feet off this traffic pattern tend to have lower attendance.

If you don't have a high-traffic coffee shop or retail space to ensure traffic flow through your building, you can create the same buzz with interactive displays. Consider installing something that was created in the library or a collection that isn't books, and make sure you place it in sight of, but across from, your main entrance. Go there for your pop-up outreach events. Alternatively, create a pop-up coffee shop as an outreach event to showcase your space.

LOW-TECH: WHITEBOARDS, ART, AND EQUATIONS

Our library leadership team recently painted interactive space directly onto our walls with whiteboard paint. Now called the Idea Wall after the paint that covers it, the whiteboard wall was a creative answer to a problem filled with potential poor optics and high expenses. For many years we had a video wall dedicated to international television shows until the vendor supplying the international feeds began to lose satellites and our eight television feeds died one by one. We, along with our international students, were disappointed that we were losing access to the feeds but couldn't justify the continued upkeep and expense of the television wall. Instead, leadership had a "Why not?" moment and painted the entire wall with whiteboard paint.

Whiteboard paint is an inexpensive alternative to purchasing large whiteboards for meeting spaces and study rooms. Like the University of Central Arkansas, we have painted whiteboards in every library study room with good results.[3] We have tried multiple brands of whiteboard paint and as of summer 2019 the whiteboard paint recommended by our facilities department is IdeaPaint. The IdeaPaint Pro line recommends professional installation but our building services department painted the entire wall without any issues. For best adhesion, our building services manager advises beginning with an exceptionally clean and perfectly smooth wall.

We painted the wall late in the spring semester. Within days, people began talking back. At first, we received plain talk about the loss of our international media. We responded directly to students on the whiteboard and emailed concerned professors and staff in our International Programs departments. Once students understood our reason for replacing the international feeds with the Idea Wall, usage began to shift. Students wrote reflections and supported or challenged each other (figures 1 and 2). Many artists drew their favorite cartoon characters or depictions of our Maverick bull mascot, while others crafted classical figure drawings (figure 3). With the recent addition of strategically placed couches, we now see many students huddled around sections of the wall writing out scientific or mathematical equations during exam time (figures 4, 5, and 6).

You can influence student use of these new interactive spaces through your social media feeds like we did. Show creative or academic whiteboard use on Instagram stories or tweet photos of engaging or witty poll answers. Create hashtags so your students can interact with you across all platforms. The University of Central Arkansas shares their whiteboard art using #UCALibraryArt.[4] Our @unolibraries Instagram hashtag, #CrissWRITEboards, includes our library's name and a play on words to tell students it is okay to write on the whiteboards (figure 7).

Our original intention for the Idea Wall was to let students erase content when they needed room for their own work, but we quickly found out that students would not erase another students' content. Our best practice now is to erase the entire wall once per week. Along with allowing space for new content, this ensures that nothing will dry onto the wall. To protect the whiteboard paint, we do not use any solvents on the wall. Through trial and error, we have found that blue and black markers are easiest to erase with little or no ghosting. If a mark doesn't come off the whiteboard wall because a whiteboard marker dried on the wall or because someone used permanent marker, we scribble over it with an easily erased color of whiteboard marker and immediately wipe it off. The dried or permanent marker will come off with the fresh marks.

We knew the large whiteboard wall would work because our experiments with a previous small whiteboard engagement exercise was successful. Likewise, our interactive spaces are successful when students create their own moments of creativity and play. Aside from one Instagram post asking people to play nice, we post no rules about whiteboard content. In large part, our students have been respectful and kind in all our interactive spaces. Our last heated discussion came about from a loaded small whiteboard question: "Should some books be banned?" (figure 8). We welcome this type of engagement until students begin
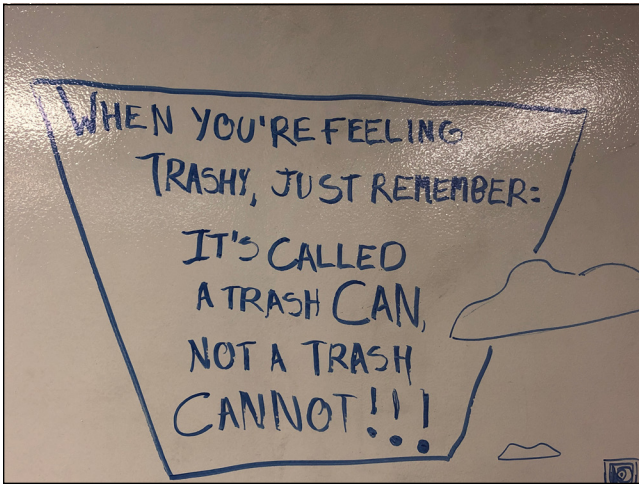
Figure 1. A note on the whiteboard wall: "It's called a trash can, not a trash cannot!!!"
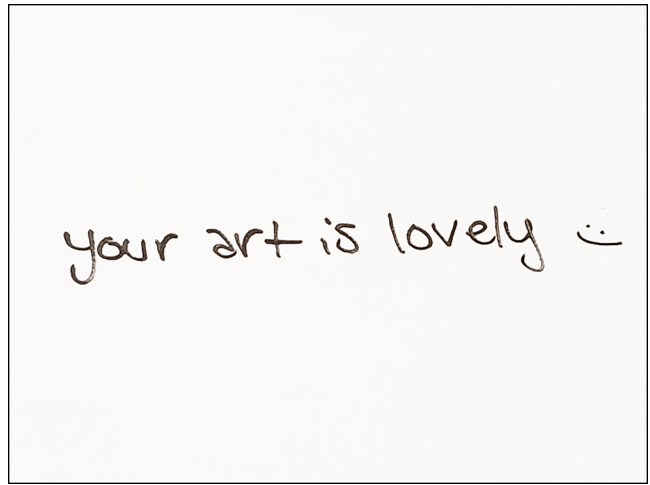

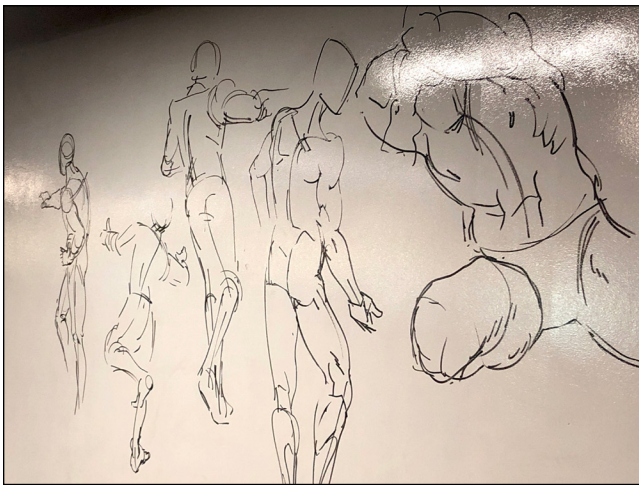**Figure 2.** A note on the whiteboard wall: "Your art is lovely."

Figure 3. Human figure drawings on the whiteboard wall.
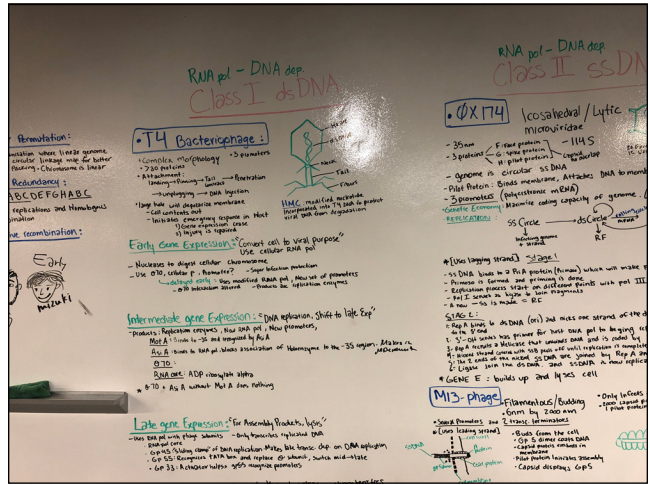

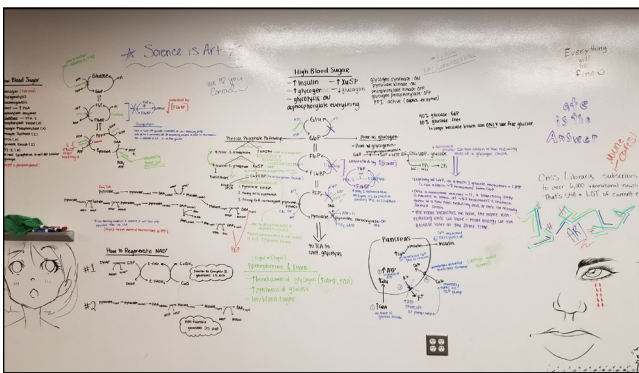**Figure 4.** Class notes on the whiteboard wall.

Figure 5. Study notes on the whiteboard wall: "Science is art."

engaging in ad hominem attacks or include graphic profanity, which rarely happens. This is our students' space to get goofy, flirty, serious, and scholastic. We hope that whether they use the Idea Wall and other whiteboards around the library for doodles or data, they are thinking and studying better than before.

HIGH-TECH: A DIGITAL WALL, GRAFFITI, AND ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

Our Creative Production Lab is on the main floor of the library and is the library's creative technology heart. It contains our 3D printers, laser cutter, vinyl cutter, VR setup, audio and video recording studios, along with a full creative computing lab. For many years, one underused piece of technology in the Creative Production Lab was the Christie interactive touch screen ("the video wall"). This large computer screen welcomed visitors to the Creative Production Lab with Fruit Ninja, a graffiti wall, or other online games. Occasionally students would create interactive presentations

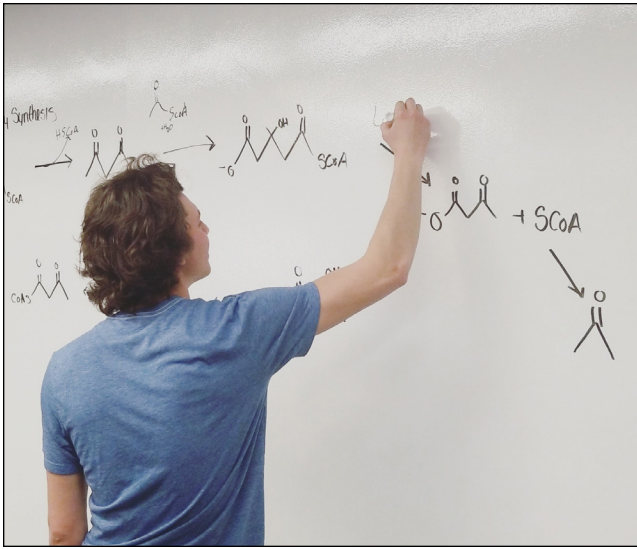**Figure 6.** Student writing notes on the whiteboard wall.

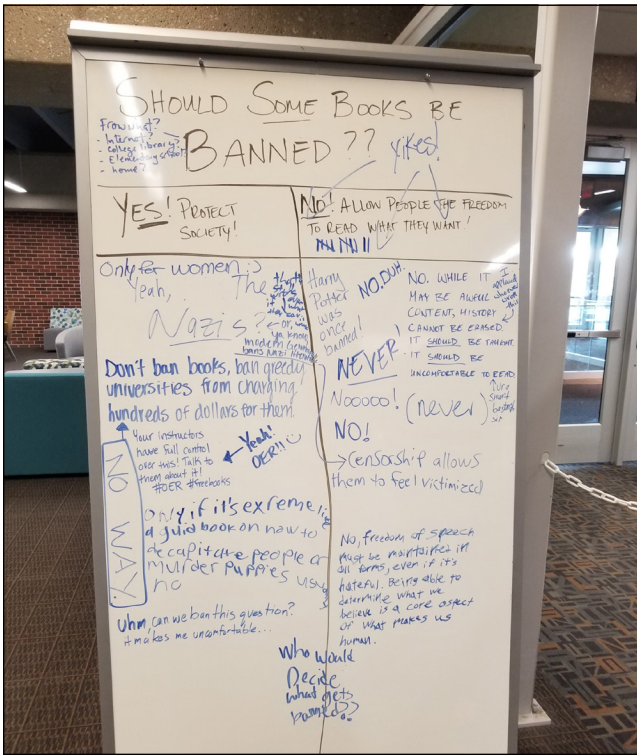**Figure 8.** Whiteboard discussion: "Should some books be banned?"

Figure 7. #CrissWRITEboards @unolibraries social media post.

April 2019						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Project Achieve	2 Human Library	3 Human Library	4 Human Library	5 Project Achieve	6 Human Library
7 Human Library	8 Human Library	9 Human Library	10 Project Achieve	11 Project Achieve	12 Project Achieve	13
14	15	16	17 Project Achieve	18 Project Achieve	19 Project Achieve	20 Project Achieve
21	22 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB	23 Project Achieve	24 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB	25 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB	26 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB	27 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB
28 10a-2p Wildflower WFAB	29 Project Achieve	30				

Figure 9. Video wall calendar.

for class projects, but not often. While these games and presentations were interesting to the people who walked into the Creative Production Lab, they had a high cost per lower-order interaction. Additionally, the large footprint of the video wall and its housing meant it was taking up valuable space in the rapidly-expanding Creative Production Lab. Because of this, we decided to move the video wall to where it would get noticed: just inside the main entrance and across

Figure 10. Interactive Human Library display on the video wall.

Figure 11. Interactive KANEKO Light exhibition marketing.

Figure 12. Student interacting with the UNO Libraries Archives and Special Collections Marlin Briscoe display by moving a 3D-scanned figurine from the collection. See the Marlin Briscoe online exhibit at unomaha.omeka.net/exhibits/show/briscoe/main.
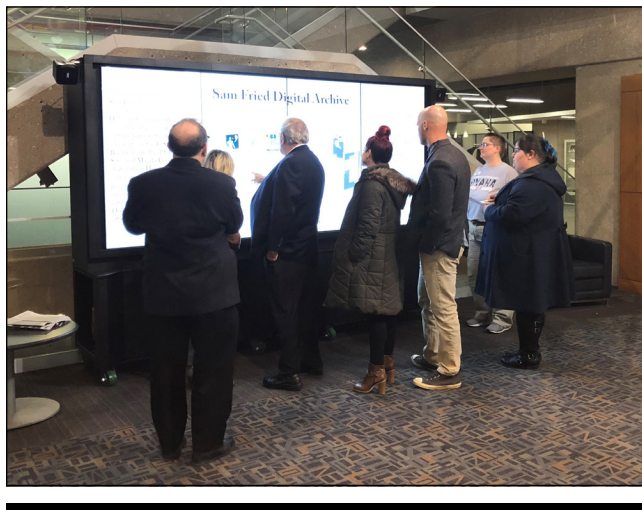

Figure 13. UNO Libraries Metadata Coordinator Angela Kroeger with Sam Fried's descendants looking through select items from the Sam Fried Digital Archives. See the Sam Fried Digital Archives online at unomaha.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collec tion/p16383coll15.

Figure 14. Former UNO Libraries Digital Initiatives Librarian Yumi Ohira with TRiO Project Achieve staff standing in front of the Project Achieve Historical Highlights digital exhibit. From left: Director Shannon Teamer, Yumi Ohira, English Specialist Connie Sorensen-Birk, Office Associate Lauren Wyler, Counselor Pat-Killeen-Brown.

from our main service desk, on the way to the coffee shop.

After the move, technicians recalibrated the screens and the video wall became part of our students' daily lives. In the mornings, turning on the video wall is part of our opening checklist. When there are event promotions, new collections, tour groups, or special events, we want the video wall to relate to those events or visitors. To share the load of organizing and reserving the video wall, our patron services department placed a calendar and page of streaming video links on our internal wiki (figure 9).

The content on the video wall changes throughout the semester. It is alternately educational, amusing, and sublime. Much of the time, it is in some way interactive. At the beginning of the semester, we use the graffiti wall to welcome our students back and introduce them to the concept of the interactive technology. We then take it month by month, with bespoke interactive presentations for theme months. Using Intuiface, a software solution with a PowerPoint-like interface, we create our own displays with layers of information.

AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

So far, we have created presentations for our Human Library (figure 10), Banned Books Week, Open Access Week, federal and local elections, and exhibitions at our partner gallery space KANEKO (figure 11). Archives and Special Collections created interactive displays featuring University of Nebraska Omaha alumni US Senator Chuck Hagel, Pro Football Hall of Famer Marlin Briscoe (figure 12), Holocaust survivor, entrepreneur, and philanthropist Sam Fried (figure 13), and the university's TRiO Student Support Services (Project Achieve) program (figure 14). We also show livestreams that encourage students to pause or sit down to watch for a while. For instance, during 2017's total solar eclipse we livestreamed NASA videos, and for finals weeks we typically stream puppies and kitties so our stressed students can decompress.

Get interactive with your displays, but don't buy technology just for the sake of technology. Ask yourself how you'll use it to inspire, educate, or delight your visitors and determine how you'll track that goal. If you have underutilized technology, take it out of its hiding place and into the library's main space for special events or for permanent installation. If you don't have the budget for a large Christie display, consider purchasing a smaller touchscreen television and mounting it to a wall. If you have a clean, smooth wall or a large whiteboard already installed in your space, look into something like an Epson BrightLink Interactive Display. Or, pair a regular television display showing an informational PowerPoint with an interactive whiteboard question nearby.

MOVING FORWARD

Since their installation, the interactive spaces described in this article have become part of the personality of the library, and we work hard to ensure they don't become stale or predictable. We continue to brainstorm new ways to use these spaces to surprise and delight our students. Ideas under development include pop-up virtual and augmented reality events staged around the café traffic pattern during our university's fall welcome week, a large special event display outside the café for fall semester, and partnerships with our campus game design club and community stakeholders to develop games for the video wall using 3D gaming engine Unity.

References

1. Priya Mehta and Andrew Cox, "At Home in the Academic Library? A Study of Student Feelings of 'Homeness,'" *New Review of Academic Librarianship* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2018.1547774.
2. David Carr, *A Place not a Place* (Lanham, MD: Altamira, 2006), 37.
3. Karen Pruneda, Amber Wilson, and Jessica Riedmueller, "Writing on the Walls: Engaging Students through Whiteboards," *C&RL News* 78, no. 5 (2017): 255, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.78.5.255.
4. Pruneda, Wilson, and Riedmueller, "Writing on the Walls," 256.