



Starting in Fall 2005 as “the occasional coffeehouse”, the Diné College Libraries occasionally reopened after hours on Fridays for a potluck and open mic session. We quickly discovered that we were filling a strong need for a venue for aspiring poets, songwriters and academics, as well as accomplished members of our community, to share their talents and creativity. Since then, it has evolved into *Friday Nights @ the Library*: a semimonthly, grant-funded, traveling series that has raised the libraries’ profile among all our constituents, including college administrators, who recognize its potential as a valuable recruitment tool.

Friday Nights @ the Library is a coffeehouse that brings together students, faculty, staff, and members of the wider community in a comfortable and casual gathering place at the library after hours, with coffee, tea, and a community potluck supper. The library setting creates a relaxed, intimate atmosphere that is welcoming for performers and stimulating for audiences. It also offers our patrons a chance to interact with our librarians in a friendly and social environment, helping them to overcome “library anxiety.”

We found that the community potluck supper that begins every coffeehouse evening promotes mingling and conversation, and the readings and music are great conversation starters. Many people have become regulars, and new friendships and even artistic collaborations have grown out of the series. Local artists discovered the coffeehouse to be a supportive environment for trying out new work, and the regularly scheduled events goad them to continue creating. The libraries benefit by taking on a more participatory role in the production of knowledge, while at the same time forming relationships with our community’s next generation of leaders, thinkers, and performers.

In May 2006, we were awarded an IMLS-funded LSTA grant through the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, in the Community Focal Point category. During the 2006-07 academic year, *Friday Nights @ the Library* is traveling to the College’s community centers in Window Rock, Ganado, Kayenta, and Tuba City. As our library reaches far beyond its walls, we are gaining new opportunities to promote our library and its services – and to support lifelong learning – in every community we serve.

1. Imagine new ways to promote the library as place

House of stories : In the Diné language, the word for *library* means “house of papers” and is the same word that is used for *post office*! We know that the library encompasses so much more than papers, but do our patrons? At Diné College, we are working hard to make a difference in our community. The coffeehouse promotes conversation and storytelling, joining oral culture and print culture—in a myriad formats, physical and virtual—in the house of stories.

Community hearth : We were inspired by our library’s position at the center of the main campus, the site of the groundbreaking ceremony for the College, where knowledge was ceremonially planted into the four directions. Thinking of the library as the community hearth, not just for the College community but also for the wider community we serve, is helping us to become more responsive to community needs.

Third place : As sociologist Ray Oldenburg has written in *The Great Good Place*, “third places...host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.” For our community, *Friday Nights @ the Library* fits this definition, and other campus divisions are beginning to schedule events at the library to capitalize on our reputation for hospitality.

2. Recognize the role of librarian/faculty/student socializing in fulfilling the library mission

“People like us” : A recent ACRLog posting (<http://acrlblog.org/2006/09/05/gaining-the-trust-of-students/>) reports that students are more likely to seek information from peers than from authority figures. Social events that promote conversation allow us to get better acquainted with students and community members. As our patrons begin to perceive us as peers and neighbors, their library anxiety vanishes.

3. Envision potential ways to support informal learning at the library

Multiple learning styles : Libraries traditionally privilege a limited number of learning styles. How many of our potential patrons stay away because we do not support their preferred modes of learning?

Lifelong learning : Events and exhibits that appeal to a wide range of ages and interests offer opportunities for informal learning and may introduce a wider community to library services and collections.

Catalyst, as well as venue, for community creativity : Simply by providing a venue for community members’ creativity, the library has taken on a participatory role in the production of knowledge, stimulating new community vitality.

4. See the value of less formal programming as an inexpensive way to build bridges among constituents

Welcoming : Less formal programming draws in community young people and adults, who discover themselves at ease in the academic community and able to envision themselves as future Diné College students.

Forming relationships : The coffeehouse and other library programming are introducing us to our community’s next generation of leaders/thinkers/artists.

Partnering : Library programming has promoted new partnerships with other campus departments and divisions, as well as with other libraries and community organizations in the broader communities we serve.

Traveling : Our traveling coffeehouse is helping to raise the profile of the College across the Navajo Nation, creating new recruitment opportunities.

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More about us:

Beatty, Victoria. “Coffee & community: Friday Nights @ the Library.” Poster session. Association of College & Research Libraries National Conference, Convention Center, Baltimore. 31 Mar. 2007.

[Friday Nights @ the Library Page](http://library.dinecollege.edu/spotlight/fridays/). 22 March 2007 <<http://library.dinecollege.edu/spotlight/fridays/>>.

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