



COLLECTING OVERDUE LIBRARY FINES WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BENEFITING THE COMMUNITY: THE FOOD FOR FINES PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND

- Himmelfarb Library's Circulation staff examined various methods to improve the collection of overdue fines.
- The Library decided to try a focused, two-week option to collect non-perishable food items as payment for overdue fines in addition to the fine collection system already in place throughout the year.
- The food would then be donated to a local food bank.

PROCESS

- The library identified a local charity that helps feed low income residents in the Washington D.C. area and verified their cooperation in the plan.
- Library staff members determined a two week period prior to spring semester finals during which non-perishable food items were collected.
- One non-perishable food item was accepted for every \$1.00 in overdue fines, to a maximum of \$20.00.

PROMOTION

- The event was promoted through posters, emails to faculty and student listservs of the three schools the Library serves, and a blog article on the Library's website.
- Throughout the initiative, food items and pamphlets from the charity, "Bread for the City," were displayed at the Circulation Desk.
- Students also spread the word to classmates, since fines are often an unpopular reality, and this method proved more effective than expected.

RESULTS

- Approximately 12 boxes of non-perishable items were collected and donated. This represented approximately \$500 in fines.
- Student enthusiasm for the Food for Fines program was a strong measure of its success as an additional year-end method to resolve outstanding fines.



RESULTS (CONTINUED)

- The strategic timing of the initiative yielded better results, as fine payments tend to spike close to the end of the academic year due to the requirement that fines be paid prior to graduation.
- Staff members at the Circulation Desk noted a reduction in the amount of complaining heard about fine payments during "Food for Fines."
- Library users donated items, even if they had no outstanding fines.

CONCLUSIONS

- The success of the initiative, as measured in total donations and positive user feedback, has led to its continued use annually.
- The Food for Fines program has helped reduce the number of outstanding fines at the end of the academic year.
- Library users appreciate the option to settle outstanding overdue fines and help the community in the process.
- The program is especially popular with graduating students and all users frequently ask when the drive will be held each year.