

**Establishing a Self-Supporting Outreach Program:  
It's harder than you think, but better than you could ever imagine.**

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## **Abstract**

*In the fall of 2002 the University Bookstore proposed to the Executive Committee of the University of Arkansas the opening and operation of a self-supporting outreach facility for the campus. The proposed concept of this program was to provide awareness of the University's academic offerings and accomplishments to the targeted consumers that do not usually visit the campus. The idea was presented to the Committee along with a five-year business and financial plan. The program was accepted and approved in the Spring of 2003. A site was selected and leased within the Northwest Arkansas Mall (about 5 miles from campus). We opened our doors for service to the targeted consumers in late November of 2003. The service and business model has proven positive and we are projecting to surpass our FY 2008 sales goal within the first twelve months of operation, which will end in November 2004. The excess income is to be invested in building and operating visitor centers for the university.*

## **Introduction of the Organization:**

The University of Arkansas is a state land-grant institution founded in 1871. Located in the Northwest Arkansas community of Fayetteville, a city with a population of 58,000 situated in the heart of the Ozark Mountains, the campus is a site of natural beauty throughout the year.

The University of Arkansas enjoys a student enrollment of over 17,000, with a support group of faculty and staff of about 3,000. The Mission of the university is to be a “nationally competitive, student-centered research University serving Arkansas and the world.” The university has a vision of serving 21,000 students by the year 2010.

Even though the campus is very beautiful and the offerings are abundant, recruiting in sufficient numbers to meet the 2010 goal has been a problem. To reach out and inform the general public more effectively, we have realized the need for an effective outreach facility and program, as well as an effective, welcoming, and visible visitor center for the campus.

The proposal of opening the outreach facility and diverting the excess income to the construction and operation of the campus visitor centers was a natural solution for this need.

### **Statement (restatement) of the Problem/Initiative**

The University’s mission and vision places a challenging puzzle before those who work toward achieving these goals. In order to meet the challenge successfully, it has become clear that an effective outreach program and facility is needed.

The outreach program must keep the community informed about our offerings and achievements; and, at the same time, must make our University more approachable

for those who would participate in and donate to programs that will help the University obtain the goals.

The outreach program includes a plan for a highly visible, very public facility that would attract the community, generate revenue, and educate the public about the University through products and publications.

### **Design**

Development of this project, included the following steps:

1. Opening the outreach facility in the heart of the community, where the public goes as a destination. In this situation, the Northwest Arkansas Mall.
2. Providing exciting, attractive, high quality merchandise to the public. The merchandise will include the private label for Arkansas and the University, which will connect the public to the institution on an emotional level.
3. Creating an accessible informational environment to make the general public aware of ongoing academic achievements and programs at the University. This includes an interactive Information Center to retrieve information directly from the University, to enroll in classes, to request data, to buy tickets to events, to receive Visitor Parking passes, and to locate destinations on campus and receive directions.
4. Providing effective displays to promote recruitment in the following areas:
  - Enrollment
  - Alumni membership and benefits
  - Continuing Education programs and courses

Many departmental staff, faculty and student organizations were made aware of this program. The feedback was extremely positive and the divisions of Business Affairs and Financial Affairs were very cooperative and supportive through all of the planning and implementation of the outreach program.

The Bookstore invested a total of \$548,000 from their operating and reserved funds to start this project. The Bookstore purchased and moved into an existing operation in the mall that was providing the same type of merchandise to the public. The \$548,000 was spent for the following:

- \$163,000 payment as good will to the original business owner.
- \$270,000 for purchases of inventory.
- \$20,000 for installation of POS, MIS system and connection to the main bookstore system through DSL technology.
- \$80,000 for renovation of the store and creation of the information technology center.
- \$15,000 purchase of a delivery van.

Additional personnel for this operation is projected at 200 weekly staff hours, including management, at a cost of about \$145,000 annual payroll.

### **Implementation:**

From when we started the proposal for this project to when we opened our doors on November 27, 2003, it took about one and a half years for implementation. Most of the

time was spent in legal negotiations with the previous owners and the mall management to secure a fair lease contract. This is the most sensitive and time consuming part of the project. It is imperative to remain extremely focused and diligent at this stage so that the goals are not compromised.

Installation of the fixtures, POS, and store merchandise set-up took the least amount of time (about 3 weeks).

### **Benefits:**

The benefits of this project were and continue to be as follow:

- Exposing the University to customers that ordinarily do not visit the campus.
- Educating the public about the University's colleges and programs through attractive merchandising.
- Having an interactive informational environment that makes the general public aware of the academic achievements and programs at the University.
- Revenue generating sales of merchandise that promotes the University while helping to fund future Visitors' Centers.
- Promoting recruitment in the following areas:
  - Enrollment
  - Alumni membership and benefits
  - Continuing Education programs and courses
- Creating a name brand image for the University Bookstore.