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Advance Graduate Research: Re-examining Outreach with Workshops

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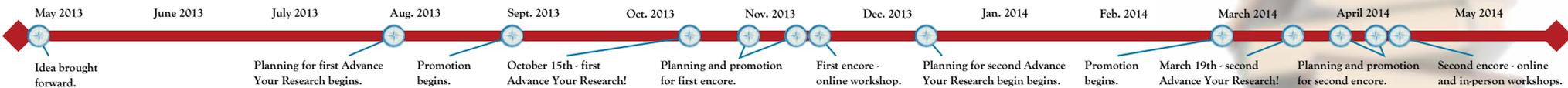
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Advance Graduate Research:

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Re-examining Outreach with Workshops



The Idea

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a large research institution with almost 6,000 graduate students in over 100 programs. It is impossible for VCU Libraries to meet the needs of this diverse population with just traditional course instruction and consultations; non-curricular instruction is necessary. However, attendance had dwindled so low that most librarians stopped offering workshops. The Advance Your Research workshop series was envisioned to focus our efforts and improve our publicity, creating an interdisciplinary event that leveraged the talents of the entire Academic Outreach department while exploring new themes and non-traditional library roles.

There are many examples of successful workshop series targeting graduate students in the literature^{1,5}. Similarly, we considered strategies to appeal to graduate students, enticing them to attend by...

- focusing planning and promotional efforts on one primary event each semester.
- choosing topics relevant to the research process and scholarly communication.
- bringing together resources from around the library and the university.
- creating an identity for Advance Your Research!

The Day Of

Schedule of Workshops
 Tuesday, Oct. 15
 8:15 a.m. Check-in opens.
 8:30 a.m. Reception for New Research. Enjoy a light breakfast, network and discuss research responsibilities around campus.
 9:30 a.m. Make an Impact: Finding the Right Journal for Your Research. Understand what a journal is and how to choose the right journal for your research.
 10:30 a.m. Your Research Thesis: Practice Your Research Process. Think about how to explain your ideas to others. Learn to deal of your research plans and organizational responsibilities, potential collaborators, sponsors and your priorities.
 11:30 a.m. Better Reference Management through Technology. Explore our most interesting organizing your research and reference using RefWorks, Zotero and other online resources.
 12:30 p.m. Learn to Love Your Librarian. Join us for lunch and informal conversations about your work with library colleagues. Please sign up for lunch at library.vcu.edu/advance-your-research.
 2 p.m. Learn to Love Your Lit Review. Learn how to locate the appropriate conversations about your work with library colleagues. Please sign up for lunch at library.vcu.edu/advance-your-research.
 3 p.m. Let Me Google That for You: How to Make the Most of Google. Discover advanced search techniques and online activities, including the power of filters, they go to eleven and put your skills to work.
 4 p.m. Can I Publish That? Working with Images and Copyright. Discover how to work with the parameters of copyright for images and media in your research and publishing.
 5 p.m. Free and Cheer! Cheers, First and Manages Workshops and Events. Emily Davis, WineTrop and Hall Cheers!
 6:30 p.m. Social Reference Management through Technology. Marlyn Scott, Reference Librarian, will demonstrate how to organize your research and reference using RefWorks.
 8 p.m. Free and Cheer! Cheers, First and Manages Workshops and Events. Emily Davis, WineTrop and Hall Cheers!

Schedule of Workshops
 Wednesday, March 19
 8:30 a.m. Check-in opens.
 9:30 a.m. Check-in. Enjoy a light breakfast and network.
 10:00 a.m. Make an Impact: Finding the Right Journal for Your Research. Understand what a journal is and how to choose the right journal for your research.
 10:30 a.m. Your Research Thesis: Practice Your Research Process. Think about how to explain your ideas to others. Learn to deal of your research plans and organizational responsibilities, potential collaborators, sponsors and your priorities.
 11:30 a.m. Better Reference Management through Technology. Explore our most interesting organizing your research and reference using RefWorks, Zotero and other online resources.
 12:30 p.m. Learn to Love Your Librarian. Join us for lunch and informal conversations about your work with library colleagues. Please sign up for lunch at library.vcu.edu/advance-your-research.
 2 p.m. Learn to Love Your Lit Review. Learn how to locate the appropriate conversations about your work with library colleagues. Please sign up for lunch at library.vcu.edu/advance-your-research.
 3 p.m. Let Me Google That for You: How to Make the Most of Google. Discover advanced search techniques and online activities, including the power of filters, they go to eleven and put your skills to work.
 4 p.m. Can I Publish That? Working with Images and Copyright. Discover how to work with the parameters of copyright for images and media in your research and publishing.
 5 p.m. Free and Cheer! Cheers, First and Manages Workshops and Events. Emily Davis, WineTrop and Hall Cheers!
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Each event included a full day of workshops with occasional short breaks and a lunch around midday. Based on a vote in our follow-up survey, we also presented three workshops in two encores:

- an online version of "Learn to Love Your Lit Review."
- an in-person repeat of "Better Reference Management through Technology."
- an online version of "Make an Impact: Finding the Right Journal for Your Research."

The Plan

Planning a full day event and coordinating with all involved is time consuming. To share the load, we used a team approach. Divided among three to four members of the Academic Outreach department, the primary stages of the planning process were...

- communicating and collaborating with the presenters. Individual presenters planned their own workshops, but coordinating with everyone was necessary to schedule individual workshop times and ensure the appropriate equipment and technology was available.
- coordinating the promotional efforts. Detailed later, promotion stressing the Advance Your Research identity was key to the continued success of the workshop series.
- event planning and logistics. Everything from installing software to vacuuming the event space to arranging catering had to be planned in advance.

The Impact

Advance Your Research attendance has exceeded expectations and far exceeded attendance at previous standalone workshops. At both full day events, we successfully attracted graduate students, although others attended. Registration helped estimate attendance, but many who registered did not attend and drop-ins were common. Participants came and went, and for the second Advance Your Research we had a core group that stayed the entire day!

The online encores were very popular and had participants from across VCU. Our in-person encore drew only two attendees, reinforcing the notion that VCU graduate students aren't likely to attend standalone workshops. Along with attending encores, there is evidence that students also followed up by visiting the Advance Your Research LibGuide.

Responses from a post event survey and from unsolicited anecdotes were generally positive, and all respondents ranked the events as "Good" or "Excellent". The Three-Second Thesis and More Than "Just Browsing" workshops required significant audience participation, and these were some of the most engaging sessions and most highly rated by participants (despite initial librarian reluctance)! Although response rates were low, we got great reviews:

- "...VERY informative presentations. It moved along. I was never bored."
- "I learned about resources that I didn't even know we had at VCU"
- "...I really liked the interactive scenarios that were presented."
- "I especially enjoyed being able to chat with librarians."
- "I really enjoyed the research seminar you hosted last week. I certainly got a lot out of it and hope to attend future events."

The Promotion

The workshops were used as a test case for a focused promotion strategy for graduate students. A checklist was developed based on initial efforts to streamline future promotion. We learned that...

- concise language allows for a creative approach that emphasizes relevance for today's graduate students.
- print materials such as posters and handbills are helpful, but the most effective methods of communicating with graduate students are e-mail based.
- a lengthy lead time is not required for promotion. Messages received within two weeks of an event yield the most registrants.

On our promotional handbills, posters, events page, LibGuide, news items and e-mail messages, we used consistent design principles and tone to describe all events in the series. This included color schemes, imagery, language and fonts. All of these components helped us build the Advance Your Research identity.

Plan Your (Graduate) Promotion

- Find a room (and use the instruction schedule if booking a library classroom).
- Meet with the Director of Communications and Public Relations to coordinate the TelegRAM (university-wide student/faculty e-mail) announcement, Library News item and any print promotional materials.
- Set up a registration/RSPV system to get an attendance estimate and for participant communication. Options include a Google form (works well for sending group e-mails) and the Technology Services training calendar.
- Consider your Web presence. This could mean a Library Events page or LibGuide.
- Submit event to the university Calendar of Events.
- Find your audience. Send a message to the Graduate School for distribution through their listserv and social media. Place materials in the John Mapp Graduate Study and Reading Room.
- Pursue more targeted approaches to individual departments and units including listservs, social media, bulletin boards, digital screens, and even individual faculty and student contacts.
- Explore possible e-communications options. For example, you can use MailChimp to create a striking banner image and manage e-mail communication.
- Send a message to relevant library staff (for informational purposes, possible participation, and more word-of-mouth promotion).
- Schedule e-mail messages within two weeks of the event, and send reminders the day before or the day of the event.
- Collect e-mail addresses of registrants, participants (via a sign-in sheet) and interested parties to send reminders, post-event information and feedback requests and to promote future events.

The Future

The Advance Your Research series allowed VCU Libraries to get involved with the graduate student research process in a new way. Despite our initial success, we hope to make improvements as we continue the series and incorporate what we've learned:

- New, innovative and active workshop topics engage students and encourage collaboration.
- Evidence suggests that timing may have more to do with attendance than topics. Our graduate students seem most available between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- Four sessions attracted an audience and allowed people to stay all day.
- Recording attendance was harder than anticipated. Enlisting one person to keep time and count attendees is helpful.
- Lunch is an attraction and elicited conversations between students and librarians. Breakfast wasn't a draw (graduate students aren't morning people).



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4. Rempel HC, Davidson J. Providing information literacy instruction to graduate students through literature review workshops. *Issues in Science & Technology Librarianship*. 2008 Winter; 53:4-4.
5. Rosowski R, brooksb@vcu.edu, Reynolds G. Assessing, analyzing, and adapting: improving a graduate student instruction program through needs assessment. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*. 2011 October; 32(6):224-239.