2014

Advance Graduate Research: Re-examining Outreach with Workshops

Bettina Peacemaker
Virginia Commonwealth University, bjpeacemaker@vcu.edu

Martha Roseberry
Virginia Commonwealth University, mroseberry@vcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_present

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Downloaded from http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/libraries_present/9

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the VCU Libraries at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in VCU Libraries Faculty and Staff Presentations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
**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. 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 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 evacuating the event space to arranging catering had to be planned in advance.

**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 promotions. 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 email 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.

**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 more attended. Registration helped estimate attendance, but many who registered did not attend and dropouts were common. Participants came and went, 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 inspection encores 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 Future**

The Advance Your Research series allowed VCU Libraries to get involved with the graduate student research process in a new way. Despite 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.
- Feedback 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).

**References**

1. Bradigan PS, Kroll SM, Sims SR. Graduate student bibliographic instruction at a large university: a workshop approach. RQ. 1987 April