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Going Analog and Getting Artsy: Programming in the Academic Library

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Lisa A. Forrest

Going analog and getting artsy

Programming in the academic library

The institutional goals of Hamilton College center upon developing the creative and critical thinking, speaking, and writing skills of students. One of the college's main focus areas, under the rubric of "Communication and Expression," challenges students to express themselves with "clarity and eloquence, in both traditional and contemporary media, through writing and speaking, and through visual, aural, gestural and other modalities."

To achieve this objective, students must pass at least three writing-intensive courses, and participate in pro-seminars that emphasize writing, speaking, and discussion (note, information literacy instruction in these courses is not required at Hamilton).

To support student success as writers and speakers, the college has invested strategically in contemporary writing and oral communications centers. These Academic Resource Centers are located on the opposite side of the campus from the library. Given this decentralized arrangement of research, writing, and oral communications support, one possible solution might be to

explore ways to establish a learning commons model of service.

While a learning commons model of service is one popular approach in supporting the learning outcomes of the institution, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Due in part to

the disparate physical arrangement of the Academic Resource Centers across campus, we view collaborations between our campus partners and the library as a place for creative opportunity.

Like many institutions, we struggle with how best to communicate the value of our services to the campus. At Hamilton, librarians and educational technologists have much to offer in terms of providing research support, and multi-

media and design assistance for written and oral communications projects. These services, however, have historically relied upon the



Hamilton College students at book making workshop.

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individual student or faculty member to request support, rather than through direct collaborations with the Academic Resource Centers.

Librarians have attempted various outreach efforts to the students using these centers, including the set up of a mobile reference station in the study area outside of the writing center, the establishment of a formal referral system, and by assigning one librarian to serve as liaison to the center. All of these efforts have been met with limited success. Initiatives such as Oral Communications Center “satellite” hours at the library have also been relatively unsuccessful in reaching students. Recognizing the need for proactive collaborations between the library and campus partners, a variety of programming initiatives to support the institution’s learning goals, communicate our value, and strengthen relationships with the community are currently being explored.

Introducing Apple & Quill

One such program, Apple & Quill, has been implemented to highlight the creative work of Hamilton’s students and faculty. Apple & Quill provides opportunity for students to participate in writing workshops and analog makerspace activities (such as book making), and publicly share their writing through organized reading events in the library. As a result, the series has attracted students and faculty to the physical library building, forged new personal connections, improved collaborations with campus partners, and engaged the community with the library. In the process, the program has also supported the creativity

and communication goals of the college in unique ways.

The library as showcase

Librarians, who often serve as liaisons to specific departments, are in an ideal position to provide opportunities in the library for writers to create and showcase their work, and create stronger contacts with faculty and students in the process. Because Hamilton College priori-



The book making workshop explores history through song.

tizes faculty-student relationships above all other aspects of the academic experience, librarians initiated the Apple & Quill program by organizing a series of readings featuring a member of the Literature and Creative Writing faculty and a member of the student body. Opportunities for audience members to share their work through open mic slots were also scheduled for each event. The series was publicized

through posters and social media, along with announcements to students by faculty in Literature and Creative Writing.

Set up for these events was not complicated—librarians created a presentation space on the first floor of the library by rearranging chairs and hooking up a mic and speakers. The reading series, which was highly attended, fostered faculty-student-librarian interaction and gave opportunity for students to gain valuable presentation skill experience. Audience members were excited about the opportunities provided by the series, and their enthusiasm encouraged the librarians to continue with the program.

Going analog

Following the first semester’s student-faculty

reading series, both a series brand and an interested, committed audience were established. As a result, the organizers then had the opportunity to collaborate more closely with other campus partners and expand events to include makerspace workshops on bookmaking and lectures that support the academic programs, such as exploration of oral history through song. Librarians collaborated with Hamilton's music faculty to feature a special folk music performance and "scrolling book" workshop.

Themed programming, such as an entire semester devoted to book arts and book making, has been very successful in drawing community members to the library and also in increasing the use of special collections materials. One of the program's more popular events, in conjunction with a book arts exhibit and lecture highlighting books from the library's own special collections, was a book making workshop held in the library.

The book arts-themed series concluded with a lecture and poetry reading by a regional archivist and poet, which focused on the book in the Digital Age. While drawing attention to the library's rich collection of items devoted to book arts, these themed events also helped to focus faculty interest in incorporating the books arts collection into their curricula. One result has been the creation of an interdisciplinary faculty workgroup in book studies. Apple & Quill's book arts programming has also helped to ignite a fresh interest in the college's letterpress facilities. What we have learned from this is that when librarians create programs that

incorporate library resources, renewed life is given to underused collections and to the library itself.

Meet the first year experience librarian

The college's First Year Experience Program, which allows students to earn points for attending campus activities, provides a unique opportunity for the first year experience librarian to connect with students

participating in Apple & Quill events. Apple & Quill's programming has recently focused on highlighting first-year students as featured readers.

Most readings take place in the library's 24/7 study space, which is transformed into a coffee house setting simply by providing refreshments, turning down the lights, and reorganizing the furniture into comfortable arrangements. Each event also provides open mic slots for any student to share his or her creative writing. In the process, the series

provides these students with opportunity to practice their presentation skills, entices more freshmen students into the library space, and creates stronger relationships between these students and the first year experience librarian.

In addition, the library's first year experience librarian teamed up with the director of the Oral Communications Center and a faculty member from Literature and Creative Writing to feature a public performance workshop held at the center. Through lecture and partner exercises, students were provided a unique opportunity to work with peer tu-



Community members explore an item from the curated book arts exhibit.

tors on reading poetry aloud. The program allowed the first year experience librarian to establish a personalized connection with the center's director and peer tutors, and be looked upon as a resource for future research and visual literacy support. The event was also a perfect way to connect the Oral Communications Center with Literature and Creative Writing students and faculty (who do not typically use the center's services due to the nature of their curriculum).

A natural partnership

Using the talent and resources already present within the community has served to develop partnerships across campus. Apple & Quill programming has allowed librarians to collaborate closely with faculty to support teaching and learning outside of the traditional

classroom, including a unique collaboration with the college's Digital Humanities Initiative (DHi). By teaming with the college's DHi, the Apple & Quill series extends the virtual footprint of the library and provides a digital meeting place for future teaching and research opportunities.

Apple & Quill events are video recorded and archived on the college's DHi website along with photos and posters for each event.¹ To encourage the use of these recordings in the classroom setting, Literature and Creative Writing faculty were asked to contribute assignment questions to accompany reading events. While Hamilton is fortunate to have a strong DHi, a blog or library website could be used in a similar manner to promote, record, and archive individual events.

Throughout the semester, social media is also used to market and promote Apple & Quill's many activities. Sharing videos, images, and links through social media is an easy way to gain new audience members, draw attention to the librarians and library resources, and build a lasting name for the series.

A reason to celebrate

When thinking about creative programming, consider reasons to celebrate. Apple & Quill's organizers worked closely with a faculty member from the Literature and Creative

Writing department to host a community celebration to commemorate one of Hamilton's beloved faculty members and poets, Agha Shahid Ali, who died in 2001. Librarians reached out Ali's colleagues and friends, and asked them to share nostalgia



Student reading at an Apple & Quill event.

or read their favorite of Ali's poems.

Students who were unfamiliar with Ali's work were provided copies of his poems to read aloud during the celebration, which cumulated with a viewing of an archival recording of Ali reading his own work. Participants also enjoyed refreshments consisting of Ali's favorite Indian foods (some recipes taken from a cookbook he donated to special collections). Not only did this event work to foster community, but also introduced Ali's work to a new audience of appreciative readers.

Getting artsy

Apple & Quill's programming has also strengthened partnerships with cocurricular partners, such as Hamilton College's art museum. Art museum personnel and librarians

recently collaborated to host an Apple & Quill writing workshop at the museum and poetry reading in the art museum space, extending the reach of the library across campus. A regional teaching artist was brought to campus to lead the workshop in the museum's space. The museum's student docents provided workshop participants with a tour of the exhibit and assisted the teaching artist. Not only did the event introduce students to the art museum, but it also provided students a new way of thinking about the connections between visual art and poetry. Literature and Creative Writing faculty demonstrated their support by sending their students to the workshop, and by attending the final reading event, which highlighted the poetry created in the workshop.

Future programming ideas

Apple & Quill's focus has until this point been geared mainly towards the literary arts. The program's organizers would like to develop beyond creative writing to feature the fine arts, such as photography, sculpture, and painting. Not only would the addition of the fine arts to Apple & Quill's programming support the college's learning outcomes of aesthetic discernment, expression, and creativity, but it would also increase collaborations between the library and the Art Department. Future programming plans include the incorporation of a visual arts display component into the library space. The additional display space will allow librarians to showcase diverse creative work, such as paintings and photography by Hamilton's students and faculty, and expand upon hands-on workshop and lecture offerings. We also see room for our peer research tutors to assist in programming efforts, both in the library and across campus.

Conclusion

Aligning the priorities of the library with that of the broader institution has not only resulted in fresh programming ideas, but has also created opportunities for librarians to expand their outreach across campus, ultimately improving their understanding of the needs of faculty and students. As librarians focus their efforts

past the traditional reference desk, initiatives such as Hamilton's Apple & Quill series serve to remind librarians of their role as partners in teaching and learning. These examples also demonstrate unique ways that librarians can support institutional goals, promote the library's collection, and create sustainable partnerships with the campus community.

Note

1. Visit the DHi website at www.dhinitiative.org/projects/applequill. *~*

Upcoming ACRL e-Learning

ACRL is offering a variety of webcasts this spring. Upcoming topics include:

Weed it and Reap: Successful Strategies for Re-shaping Collections (Webcast: July 15, 2015)

Librarians Collaborate! Working Across Two- and Four-Year Institutions to Teach Transfer Students Information Literacy Skills (Webcast: July 22, 2015)

Assessing Faculty Perceptions and Use of OER and the Implications for Libraries (Webcast: August 19, 2015)

Collaborating for Student Success: Libraries and High Impact Educational Practices (Webcast: August 26, 2015)

Beyond Worksheets: Using Instructional Technologies for Authentic Assessment of Student Learning (Webcast: October 7, 2015)

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