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Repackaging library workshops into disciplinary bootcamps

Creating graduate student success

Academic libraries typically offer short, stand-alone workshops focused on specific topics. These might be 60- to 120-minute sessions on topics such as an introduction to citation management software, text analysis, 3-D printing, or systematic reviews, and are predominantly offered throughout the fall and spring semesters.

At the Cornell University Library (CUL), we have repackaged existing library workshops into an immersive three- or four-day research skills bootcamp for graduate students. The idea came from an ethnographic study to investigate how library services might impact attrition and completion rates for humanities PhD students.¹ Findings revealed that the library could assist graduate students by 1) creating frameworks that encourage peer learning communities, 2) developing learning and networking opportunities outside academic department spaces, and 3) providing instruction in research and information management skills.

To address these three areas, CUL piloted the Humanities Doctoral Student Immersion Program in 2012. The program took a holistic approach to teaching information management skills that address all stages of the research lifecycle, while creating an environment that would foster communication and relationship building across graduate fields of study. After its initial success, we have not only continued this program but expanded

into other disciplines. We believe that this program, one that teaches skills that are not typically taught in the classroom but are essential to research, can and should be adapted by other academic libraries.

Evolution of the immersion programs

For each immersion program, a central theme is maximizing the use of free tools, resources, and expertise offered through the library and beyond. Participants gain skills that help them to save time, boost organization, and develop a competitive edge as students and potential job applicants. Community building happens for the cohort through end-of-day, lunch, and break discussions; during a participant-led “best apps and hacks” showcase; and through shared learning experiences.

Since 2012, the Humanities (now the Humanities and Social Sciences) Doctoral Student Immersion Program has been offered over four full and consecutive days during the winter intersession, a time when graduate

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students are often available and otherwise unencumbered. The program is consistently full (between 15 and 20 students), and participants are highly engaged. Many past participants who had forged a close bond with the librarian coordinators have kept in touch, and exit surveys show a high level of satisfaction from the participants. Through multiple methods of feedback, it is apparent how successful the program has become.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Immersion Program (HSSIP) has settled on a general schedule that we adjust yearly. Day

side of the immersion program, that graduate students in all disciplinary areas have the same basic research needs, whether they are social scientists, humanists, life scientists, or physicists. With this in mind, and the successes of HSSIP, a natural next step was to apply the same model to other disciplines. In January 2017, we piloted a Science Immersion Program (SIP) for students in the natural and physical sciences.

SIP launched using the guiding principles established for HSSIP: to encourage peer-learning communities outside academic de-



Science Immersion 2017 certificate awardees.

One begins with an overview of library discovery systems and meetings with subject librarians, followed by a half-day workshop on the citation management software, Zotero. Day Two focuses on research tools and habits, such as using cameras as archival research tools, digital privacy and personal file archiving, Excel best practices, the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database, and image searching techniques. Day Three focuses on the scholar's public life, including managing your online persona, creating effective presentations, publishing in a networked era, and understanding copyright. Finally, Day Four is an introduction to digital humanities, including a showcase of other graduate students' digital humanities projects.

We have learned through our interactions with graduate students, both within and out-

partment spaces, and to equip students with information management skills. It follows a similar timeline (over winter break) and structure (traditionally three days, but will be expanding in 2020 to four days in order to offer one day devoted to more practice with hands-on tools). SIP reflects the research lifecycle to give context and sequence, and sessions include expert searching, scientific collaboration tools, data management and visualization, and scholarly communication. Librarians teach most sessions, but some are taught by nonlibrary faculty, such as sessions on writing a scientific abstract and delivering effective presentations. When we identify gaps in the research lifecycle that we want SIP to address, we engage campus partners who already teach lessons on the topic and request their involvement with SIP. To date, SIP co-

ordinators have experimented with the best programmatic flow, and are working towards finding a daily formula similar to that of HSSIP.

Assessment in the form of pre-program, daily, and post-program surveys has allowed both programs to evolve and keep pace with changing research habits and needs. Initially, we offered SIP to anyone in the sciences, including the natural and physical sciences. Feedback led us to conclude that we must narrow our target audience in subsequent years. Scientific disciplines include a diverse range

must create a program by combining existing library workshops in a cohesive structure and scheduling presenters accordingly. The organizers of the programs then determine the appropriate cohort size, reserve spaces, arrange for food and other necessities, and ensure that audiovisual support is available.

The CUL immersion programs are marketed via the Cornell Graduate School, department administrators, liaison librarians, newsletters, LCD screens, and library websites during the two-month application period. Interested

A promotional slide for Science Masters and Doctoral Students Library Immersion. The slide features a background image of a water splash with a small globe at the bottom. The text on the slide includes: "Science Masters and Doctoral Students Library Immersion", "Learn specialized research and presentation techniques:", "Advanced Citation Management • Complex SEARCH Strategies • Author Rights • Data Management • Online Research Presence • and much more!", "Lunch and \$150 stipend provided!", "Applications for 15 spots accepted until Dec. 1 at tinyurl.com/Cornell-science-immersion", and "Questions?: cul-sci-immersion-L@cornell.edu". The Cornell University Library logo is in the bottom right corner.

Science Masters and Doctoral Students Library Immersion

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Cornell University Library

Science Immersion LCD promotional slide.

of specialties, and we learned that some of the sessions we offered in our initial program excluded those from the applied sciences or the natural sciences, leaving the participants unsatisfied with sections that focused on one or the other. Therefore, in our second year, SIP targeted a narrower audience, specifically those in agriculture and life sciences. In 2019, the CUL immersion programs expanded again to include a physical sciences and engineering program to bring us up to three separate, but related, programs to address three broad disciplines.

Implementing the immersion programs

Implementing the immersion programs requires project management skills that are typically used by librarians to run other library workshops or events. Coordinators

students are required to apply through an online form, in which they provide their department, year in their academic program, research focus, and describe what they hope to learn through participating in the program.

A cohort size of about 15 seems to be ideal for each program, as that brings both diversity of participants and an intimacy for peer learning, discussion, and reflection. At the conclusion of the program, participants receive certificates of completion, all workshop materials, and a link for a continually updated research guide.

How do we measure success?

Each program brings valuable opportunities and outcomes for the participants and the library. Excellent patron-librarian relationships are one of the fundamental benefits from the immersion programs. One participant noted,

I would highly recommend the program to incoming students, and I have done so, because it changed my perception of what a library is

and what librarians do. Through this workshop, I have developed a professional relationship with a librarian and identified other resources for my research.

In addition, each cohort of immersion program participants becomes part of a community that has the potential to last for years to come, as evidenced by this student's comment:

It was helpful to connect with other grad students to talk about issues of productivity. It decreased my sense of struggling alone while I was still finding my feet in graduate school.

Perhaps most importantly, the programs teach students effective research skills. These comments highlight some of the ways that this can manifest:

I can't emphasize enough how helpful the program was in transforming my approach to research. My time spent in archives in the past year was completely driven by what I learned from the immersion program. Beyond that, it has helped in my daily life as a grad student, including my approach to data management, etc.

Everything was mind-blowing, but Zotero has been life-changing.

I kept all the materials/handouts on research and used them throughout my graduate career.

Participants also commented about how this program filled a unique need:

I think we're not taught these topics anywhere else and they're very important.

It's the crash-course to research I never had.

And one mentioned the usefulness of having the program as an intensive bootcamp:

It's an endlessly useful resource and I found it much more effective to do these workshops as an intensive rather than piecemeal.

Finally, of the 37.5% of past participants who responded to a recent survey about the immersion programs, 95% said that their participation in the program made them a more successful graduate student. Perhaps the best measure of success is that 95% of past participant respondents said that they have encouraged other graduate students to apply for the immersion program.

Program challenges

With the opportunities that the immersion programs bring, there are also challenges to consider. Since the programs occur almost simultaneously and pull from similar staff expertise, several presenters did the same, or similar, presentations for each program. This requires coordination by the organizers, and also depends on the presenters' availability. In addition, scheduling the immersion session a few days too early or late can mean that presenters and students are not available, so care must be taken in identifying the most opportune time. If we continue to grow and increase our disciplinary scope, we must be mindful of the additional burden on our already busy instructors.

The immersion programs require a fair amount of administrative support for a relatively small group of graduate students. For the inaugural year, SIP organizers spent 81 hours preparing for and running the program, but for the program's second year, total time spent was half that, only 41 hours. While this second year is more reasonable, how do we scale the program and maintain the quality without overtaxing our resources? We believe the hours spent in preparation for SIP will be reduced with each iteration of SIP until

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subscriptions. While citations reflect worldwide influence, the value of a journal subscription to a single library is more reliably measured by the rate at which it is downloaded by local users. If reported download rates accurately measure local usage, there is a strong case for using them to compare the cost-effectiveness of journal subscriptions. We examine data for nearly 8,000 journals downloaded at the ten universities in the University of California system during a period of six years. We find that controlling for number of articles, publisher, and year of download, the ratio of downloads to citations differs substantially among academic disciplines. After adding academic disciplines to the control variables, there remain substantial “publisher effects,” with some publishers reporting significantly more downloads than would be predicted by the characteristics of their journals. These cross-publisher differences suggest that the currently available download statistics, which are supplied by publishers, are not sufficiently reliable to allow libraries to make subscription decisions based on price and

reported downloads, at least without making an adjustment for publisher effects in download reports.

“A Seat at the Table: Information Literacy Assessment and Professional Legitimacy” by Robert Detmering, Samantha McClellan, and Amber Willenborg. This qualitative study explores academic librarians’ perceptions of and experiences with information literacy assessment, focusing primarily on issues of professional identity, agency, and power. Findings from in-depth interviews reveal that instruction librarians view teaching as integral to their professional identity and use assessment to legitimize that identity, both personally and at the institutional level. While this suggests that assessment has the potential to elevate the status of librarians on campus, the interviews also highlight ongoing professional and organizational tensions that hinder assessment efforts and inhibit librarian agency. The authors recommend more transparent communication, among other strategies, to address these challenges. *✍*

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it reaches a basic level required to run the program well. However, the time it takes to create and implement the program must be considered when contemplating whether to pilot this program.

Looking forward

While the content that these immersion programs are providing is not unique, the framework through which they are presented and their intense, three- or four-day delivery allows students a more comprehensive view of the research process and skills that should be developed to be effective along the path. By bringing broad disciplinary cohorts together to learn information management skills, the library helps to build student networks and gives librarians, students, and sometimes faculty an opportunity for close collaboration. Clearly, this is a realm—both academic and otherwise—that the library should cultivate. In addition, the

impact of these immersion programs on its participants is significant, both in the short- and long-term, as demonstrated by feedback from our past participants.

We hope that other libraries will be inspired to adopt a similar program to reach students who may need support in building their communities and learning critical research skills. Chances are that the expertise already exists within your library, and that it is just a matter of repackaging the workshops into a cohesive bootcamp program to deliver a full, impactful experience from which graduate students may benefit for a lifetime.

Note

1. Gabriela Castro Gessner, et al., “Humanists in the House of Learning: Academic Research Libraries’ Role in Fostering Communities of Practice,” in *Proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2013), 281–88. *✍*