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Outreach from academic libraries

Supporting our local school district's diversity initiative

Campus and community outreach activities often play an essential role in fulfilling the mission of academic libraries at public institutions. At the University of Florida (UF), library employees are partnering with local schools to support student learning and development through the exploration of new technologies and historical resources. In past years, the UF Libraries have collaborated with local teachers to host academic library tours, collection exploration, and research workshops. The UF-Marston Science Library has also hosted Girls Tech Camp,¹ a one-week summer camp to encourage middle school girls to pursue STEM education and careers. Building on these past activities, the UF Libraries conducted a pilot project in summer 2019 to support the diversity initiative of the local school district.

The project focused on establishing a partnership with Westwood Middle School in Gainesville, Florida, and facilitating a half-day workshop at the school for students in the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) Summer Camp, which would function as a pilot for future programs. 21CCLC is a free, academic, and personal enrichment program of the Alachua County Public School district. The visit was designed to increase students' interests in education, improve digital literacy skills, and also demonstrate that libraries (and librarians) are fun and relevant. Activities were designed to engage youth, particularly those of underrepresented populations. The workshop activities incorporated technology from Marston Science Library and historical resources from the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Litera-

ture, the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica, and the Latin American & Caribbean Collection.

About Westwood Middle School

Located in the heart of Gainesville, Westwood Middle School serves a diverse body of nearly 1,000 students.² The largest middle school in the Alachua County School District, Westwood is a majority-minority school with a racial equity score of 2/10.³ It features a robust curriculum, including the Cambridge Program, and elective courses in Robotics, Musical Theater, Digital Application, Band, and Spanish, as well as curriculum for gifted, advanced, and ESOL students.

The 21st Century Program

21CCLC is a free, federal-funded academic after-school and summer program provided by the School Board of Alachua County in North-Central Florida as a "key component" to the state's Every Student Succeeds Act.⁴ 21CCLC offers academic and personal enrichment programs. Westwood is one of eight participating schools in the district through which students receive "opportunities for tutoring and aca-

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demographic enrichment, personal enrichment, and other activities designed to complement the regular school day.⁵⁵ The 21CCLC program is staffed by Florida-certified teachers and support staff. 21CCLC enriches student learning and development through tutoring, mentoring, career exploration, health education, and the arts. Participation is free to all students, including meals and field trips.

Equitable and inclusive education

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a strategic direction of UF Libraries. Librarians seek opportunities to promote DEI in all of their activities, especially in outreach to public schools. By partnering with schools and teachers, academic librarians support local efforts to close racial achievement gaps and to build equity in education.

In Florida, where there is a state mandate to teach African and African American History, Hispanic Heritage, and the Holocaust (1933-1945), the Smathers Libraries collections and resources are used to support teaching in these areas.⁶ The need to address racial inequities in Alachua County public schools has recently been reaffirmed. In 2018, UF's Bureau of Economic and Business Research published a detailed report on racial inequities in Alachua County and found that African American and Hispanic communities experience a higher rate of discrimination in education, employment, and the justice system. As a result, discrimination increases income disparities and segregation, which in turn negatively impacts student performance. The 21CCLC summer workshop is

just one of the ways the Smathers Libraries are partnering with local schools and communities to address racial and educational inequities.

Workshop development

The project team contacted the 21CCLC program coordinator to discuss a pilot workshop. The team re-structured activities used in previous Girls Tech Camps, adapting content to challenge underrepresentation in children's literature and increase digital literacy skills. The



Finding children's book characters that look like me. Photo: S. Stapleton

workshop activities used existing library assets that could be easily transported off-site, including iPads, books, two Breakout Edu games, as well as the time, skill, and expertise of library employees. Permission to access open-source software through the Internet was arranged with Westwood prior to the workshop.

A budget of \$350 was developed to purchase flash drives for each student, provided by the Marston Science Library. 21CCLC provided snacks and lunch, so the workshop budget did not need to include food. Future iterations will include funds to organize a book club activity from the Baldwin Library of Historic Children's Literature and Intersections on Global Blackness and Latinx Identity, a Mellon-funded project through the UF Center for Humanities & the Public Sphere. Each of the project team members was required by the Alachua County School Board to complete a volunteer registration application prior to the workshop. Four team members previously led activities for Girls Tech Camp and received prior institutional training and clearance for working with minors. Since the UF

Libraries were not hosting the 21CCLC program, background screening was not required as it is for camp hosts.

Workshop activities

Three learning outcomes were identified for this workshop: challenging underrepresentation in children's literature, the significance of using strong passwords as a digital literacy skill, and that libraries are fun.

Ten library employees led the half-day workshop. Thirteen middle school students and five middle school teachers attended the workshop. Two activities were developed, one offered before lunch and the second afterward.

Activity #1: GIF Story Creation

Gen Z students encounter digital technologies every day in a variety of ways. Through social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram) and sandbox video games (e.g., Minecraft), today's youth are skilled content creators. Using the students' technological and creative skill sets, the campers were challenged to create their own GIF stories using illustrations from selected children's and young adult books featuring or written by underrepresented groups. A GIF Story is a set of images organized into a sequence to visually convey a story, which is then accompanied by a spoken narration.

Prior to the program, the project team received approval to access the school's Internet for this activity. Since many schools restrict Internet access, gaining site approval and Wi-Fi access was an essential part of the planning process. At the start of the session, the session facilitators presented a sample GIF story to help explain the objectives of the activity. The campers were then divided into groups and given a series of books. Each member of the group was also given an iPad, which they used to take and edit photos of book illustrations and texts. Each group was asked to select 10-to-15 photos for their GIF story.

Once the groups had taken, edited, and selected their photos, the campers uploaded the photos to Ezgif an open-source GIF maker. After uploading, the groups cropped their images to a uniform size, created their desired

sequence, and determined the time duration for each frame. The Ezgif platform allows features options to crossfade each frame and to limit the number of times the GIF is looped. After generating their GIF, each group was able to further customize their story within the Ezgif platform by adding filters, frames, color presents, and more.

At the end of the session, each group presented their GIF stories. Since 21CCLC is strongly focused on supporting student learning and academic excellence, the GIF Story Creation activity offered the campers a new way to engage with literature. The selection of diverse books, curated by the project team, allowed students to explore literary and illustrative representations of characters similar to themselves. The use of familiar technologies allowed the campers to immerse themselves in the activity and apply their creative energies to authoring and narrating a collection of inventive (and even very personal) GIF stories. Given the initial selection of books, the campers created stories with protagonists from underrepresented groups. In this way, the activity fulfilled one of the intended goals of the visit: to empower children who are usually marginalized.

Activity #2: Cybersecurity in a Box

Developing digital literacy skills is important for youth as they create their own web presence. Students in middle school are increasingly unsupervised in their use of digital resources, and some are of age to create their own online accounts (e.g., Adobe requires users to be 13 years old or older to create their own accounts). Recognizing emerging independence of middle school youth online, we conducted an interactive instruction session in cybersecurity that fosters student engagement and promotes retention of new information. Problem-based learning in a team environment also promotes appreciation for diverse perspectives and skill sets among participating youth.

One important criteria in digital literacy is the use of strong passwords to prevent account misuse. UF Libraries offer a variety of community outreach programs and have acquired engag-

ing tools for instruction for these programs, including the Breakout EDU immersive learning game.⁷ The objective of this activity was to actively engage middle school students in digital literacy. UF Librarians prepared the Lip Sync Revenge Breakout game (A. Brucker and M. Hammons with Common Sense Education, game designers) to illustrate the importance of digital password protection. The Lip Sync Revenge storyline invites youth to learn how their digital footprint can be misused. As the school band lip sync competition approaches, a sister and brother are accused of tampering with grades in their school computer system. To prove their innocence, the two must solve puzzles to identify who stole and misused their account information. The game was tested to gauge appropriateness, engagement, and duration. Materials and handouts were prepared for two teams of students to compete in solving the Lip Sync Revenge.

While youth were out of the classroom at lunch, UF Library employees prepared the room, set up two tables for the teams and a desk for a fictional teacher, and distributed clues to the games. The camp director was asked to assign youth to two teams. She elected to divide the group mainly by gender. We introduced the game with a series of questions: Raise your hand if you have any online accounts. How many passwords do you have to access these accounts? One, 2-5, more than 5. How often do you change your passwords? What can happen if your password is easy to guess or isn't changed often?

The introductory storyline was shared, and two teams set to work on two separate Breakout EDU boxes, solving the five puzzles to discover the identity of the student who stole their passwords. Working in teams, the students were able to share different strengths, contributing to the solution of different clues. Having two teams in competition to solve

the problem provided incentive to focus and work together.

Once the last clue was solved, the Breakout EDU box was opened, and everyone received a prize. UF Library employees led a discussion on what worked well in the teams, and what was troublesome. A handout reviewing the digital literacy skills for cybersecurity was distributed. The handout provided best practices for online passwords that are difficult to steal, and served as a conversation starter for youth to share with their families and reflect upon the camp activity.



Sharing Our Revised Story, Photo by S. Stapleton

Workshop feedback and next steps

The students and teachers actively engaged in the activities. Cheryl Alexaitis, 21CCLC program administrator at Westwood Middle School said that UF Libraries got an A+; “your ‘field trip’ was amazing and kept the students engaged throughout the day.”⁸ Based on the success of this initial collaboration, UF Libraries and 21CCLC will consider repeating the workshop in future summer camps or after-school programs.

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Notes

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11. To view the Information Literacy Action Plan template, go to <https://go.osu.edu/teachinfolitshared>. *ZZ*