

Jennifer Smith and Onnica Marquez

Kids in the stacks

Summer camp at an academic library

It's summer, and there are middle school students running around the university library. Why?

St. Ambrose University (SAU) Library held summer camps for 6th- through 8th-grade students in 2018 and 2019. The first was Digital Film Camp, and the second was National History Day Boot Camp. If you work in higher education, chances are good that you've heard about the campus demographic cliff¹ and been charged with doing your part to address this enrollment challenge. In alignment with a campus-wide initiative to bolster pre-college summer camps for potential students, the library hosted summer camps for middle school students as part of this community outreach and engagement strategy. The goal of these camps was to offer enriching experiences that create positive impressions of the campus and library.

SAU is a midwestern university with approximately 3,000 students. It is grounded in the liberal arts tradition and offers 60 undergraduate programs and 16 graduate programs. The library is staffed by a dozen employees, a mixture of faculty and staff. Several library employees from different departments partnered on this project: a reference and instruction librarian, an archivist, and a media services librarian. The aim of this article is to provide other academic librarians with a framework for creating their own summer camp.

Planning

Our campus has a robust summer camp program, and we regularly see engineering campers looking for design problems to solve in the library. Typically summer is quiet at our library, which made it an ideal time to develop new programming.

Preparation began in the spring, and we sought advice from faculty in other disciplines who organized summer camps in the past. We received a wide range of suggestions, including camper/adult ratios, safety precautions, and the sage guidance that granola bars are not a desirable snack for campers.

We worked with a colleague in our Academic Advising Office who coordinates summer camps. She helped with advertising and promotion, online registration materials (including campus liability and photography waivers), swag bags, and mandatory online training for anyone working with minors. Camp costs were minimal, which enabled us to keep enrollment costs low. Scholarships were available for any family that requested one.

2018 Digital Film Camp

In 2018, our team brainstormed ideas for different camps, anticipating that our first one would be offered in the summer of 2019. However, a stroke of brilliance changed our timeframe. Digital Film Camp fit our campus yearly theme, Visual Narratives, so we decided to offer it immediately in August 2018. We were excited to enhance our digital filmmaking skills and believed we could create a high-quality experience for campers with minimal staff time. We decided three half days would be manageable for our first camp.

Jennifer Smith is librarian assistant professor, email: smithjennifera@sau.edu, and Onnica Marquez is archivist, email: marquezonnica@sau.edu, at St. Ambrose University

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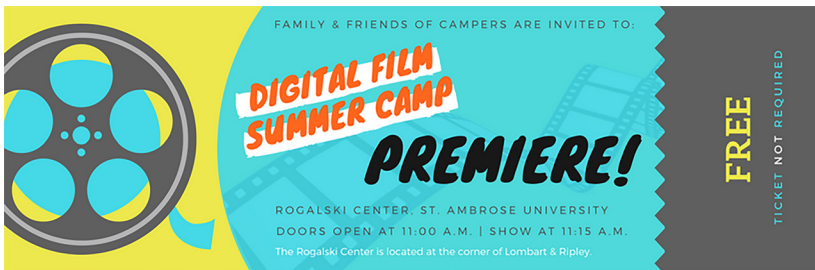
Together we devised rules, ice breakers, lesson plans, and awards. We bought allergen-free snacks and drinks, and assembled supplies and giveaways.

During the camp, participants learned about different aspects of the filmmaking process, including storyboarding, filming, video editing, and sound. They worked in small groups to create five-minute videos. Their work represented a variety of filmmaking techniques: live action, stop motion, and green screen. By the end of the camp, each group completed a short film.

On the first day, we gave a brief presentation examining each film style and showed examples. Campers were given workbooks for their notes, storyboards, and scripts. They formed groups according to their choice of film style. We gave a tour of the media lab and showed them the equipment they could use, such as video cameras,

The camp ended with a film premiere and awards ceremony in the campus ballroom. Families were invited to attend. We borrowed a photo backdrop from our Admissions Office to create a red carpet experience. The Student Activities office lent us a popcorn maker, and we provided lemonade. One of our student workers created an awards slideshow, complete with a soundtrack that was shown at the premiere party and emailed to the campers along with a follow-up survey.

We were amazed by what the campers created. One group took 500 still photos of Legos and created an epic chase scene after a bank robbery gone awry, complete with an oil spill on the road. There was also a whiteboard animation Hamilton parody, an elaborate mad scientist scam using the green screen, and a live-action, MacGyver-inspired gas leak escape movie.



A ticket for the film premiere—the culmination of the camp.

microphones, and green screens. They also received flash drives to save their video projects.

Within an hour they were writing scripts and creating storyboards. The second half of the morning was spent gathering props, costumes, and even a few extra actors. Before they could begin filming, each group met with us to share their scripts, storyboards, and discuss equipment needs. Some groups were ready to start filming on the first day.

The next day, we introduced the campers to iMovie, the software they would be using for their films. After that, we set them loose to film. We were available to answer their questions, troubleshoot, and get last-minute supplies.

On the final day, campers put the finishing touches on their projects and met with a youth services librarian from the local public library. She encouraged their participation in a teen digital film competition cohosted by the public library and promoted available digital filmmaking resources.

The campers learned a lot from Digital Film Camp, and so did we. For example, we had originally capped enrollment at 20 participants, fortunately only 12 enrolled. We only had four workstations with iMovie installed, which meant there was one for each group. Even so, it was hard for three people to congregate around one monitor and keyboard. We would have run into time management problems if five or six groups needed to share four computers.

It also would have been more efficient to give campers laptops instead of creating workbooks for their scripts and storyboards. We were surprised at the amount of craft supplies requested. Our recommendation would be to have lots of craft materials available in an accessible location. We spent a lot of time running around fetching craft supplies.

This camp was heavily dependent on the use of technology. Our persistent fear was that something wouldn't work right or projects wouldn't save

properly. This caused a lot of stress, even though nothing went wrong.

The biggest thing we learned was that we needed to add one more day to camp because three half-days wasn't long enough. Many of the groups rushed to complete their projects. Parents indicated a preference for a four-day camp in the post-camp survey.

2019 National History Day Boot Camp

After the success of our first camp, we decided to host another camp in the summer of 2019. With input from camp participants and reflecting on our previous experience, we selected National History Day (NHD)² as our theme. SAU hosts NHD regional judging each spring, and a few of the camp leaders are judges. In addition, the SAU Library routinely hosts research workshops for local middle and high school classes that are preparing for NHD. The camp allowed us to highlight the Archives and Special Collections, Media Services, reference and circulating collections, and incorporate information literacy skills. An NHD camp was a good fit and allowed us to deepen our knowledge of this event.

Our goal for this camp was to introduce historical research concepts and the five project categories: documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, and website. The purpose was not to have a completed project ready for contest submission, instead, campers experimented with each of the different categories during the four half-days of camp.

Campers were provided binders with the NHD Contest Rule Book, 2020 Theme Book, research tips, note cards, pens, pencils, highlighters, and flash drives. Daily snack time included brain breaks, such as history-themed hangman and trivia.

The 2020 NHD theme was Breaking Barriers

in History. On the first day of camp we discussed the theme and its importance to both the research and judging processes. We provided campers with a brief overview of the different projects and basic contest rules. We also introduced them to information literacy concepts like topic selection, thesis development, finding primary sources, and formatting citations. They selected a wide variety of topics covering groundbreaking artists, scientists, and historical events.

On the second day, a history professor spoke to the campers about judges' expectations for papers and provided valuable insight on how to craft one. Our coauthor/archivist taught campers how to write, format, and mount exhibit labels with a hands-on activity.

The following day focused on performances and documentaries. We hired a theater student to teach campers about staging and costumes. He engaged them with a lively improv session. Our media services librarian highlighted free video editing products for

documentaries. Campers experimented with the software by adding images and creating voiceovers.

On the final day, campers used Weebly to practice creating websites, which at the time was NHD's mandatory website platform. Since we are seasoned NHD judges, we gave them a sneak peak of the judging and evaluation procedures. Throughout the camp, we stressed the importance of using primary sources and ended camp with a behind-the-scenes tour of Archives and Special Collections.

Like our first camp, we thought this was a success based on camper feedback with 100% responding they had learned "a lot" about NHD. All campers indicated they were planning to or thinking about entering the NHD competition in the future. Some campers wanted more time to work on projects, while others seemed content experimenting with the different types of project entries.



Campers examine materials in the Archives.

In some respects, this camp was easier than our first because we had prior experience participating in NHD as judges. Planning required a smaller time investment because research is our area of expertise.

Future camps

Following both camps, we solicited feedback from participants about future offerings. Campers indicated interest in podcasting, 3-D printing, escape rooms, songwriting, and tabletop gaming. We can envision many exciting campus and community partnerships around these potential camp ideas. With these topics, we could easily run a five-day camp. Additionally, we plan to broaden our reach by advertising to the homeschool community and participating in school summer camp fairs.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SAU Library did not host a camp in 2020, and we are not planning one for 2021. We hope to host another camp in summer 2022. But for libraries that want to jump right in, there's no reason to rule out a virtual format.

One surprising discovery was camper interest in learning more about careers in libraries, archives, and museums. They absolutely loved touring the Archives and even suggested we host a library and

archives-themed camp in the future. This would allow the SAU Library to partner with local libraries, archives, and museums to host a career camp. Creating opportunities for young people to have positive experiences in libraries translates into continued support for library workers and the role of libraries in their communities.

Summer camps enable academic libraries to boost their visibility to potential students, while building relationships across their campuses and with the greater community. They are a great way to highlight your library's strengths, learn new skills, and energize the quiet days of summer in a university library.

Acknowledgements

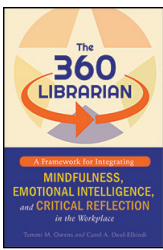
Camp collaborators were Karly Lyle, Erin Moore, and Jillian Tomasino.

Notes

1. Scott Jaschik, "New Book Argues Most Colleges Are about to Face Significant Decline in Prospective Students," *Inside Higher Ed*, 8 January 8, 2018, www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/01/08/new-book-argues-most-colleges-are-about-face-significant-decline.

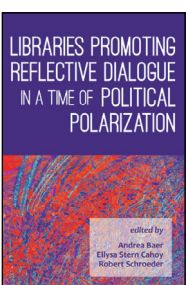
2. About National History Day, visit www.nhd.org/. *zc*

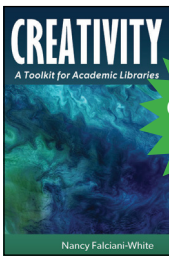
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