Jennifer Bidwell and Brinna Pam Anan

Advancing professional skills in undergraduate students

Faculty-student mentorship

In 2019, three faculty—a psychology professor and two faculty librarians—at Cal Poly Pomona (CPP), collaborated on an open pedagogical project to provide a hands-on experience for undergraduates taking a psychology course, Program Evaluation (PSY 4430/A).[1] Taught by Michael Giang from CPP's Psychology department, the Program Evaluation course was designed not only to teach students about research designs, methods, analysis, assessment, and communication strategies to improve social and organizational issues, but also to help build the students' résumés with real-life experiences of collaborating with professionals across campus to improve current programs. The two of us mentored and worked with Giang's student teams that were tasked to evaluate the library's APA citation workshop.

Background

Giang's Program Evaluation course is designated as a "Signature Polytechnic Experience" (i.e., PolyX) course which engages students to partner together to address global challenges in a diverse and interdisciplinary world while receiving intense mentoring.[2] PolyX is a discovery and learning initiative at Cal Poly Pomona aimed at enhancing students' creativity and innovation in support of the university's "learn by doing" ethos. Students in teams of 4–6 members would meet with campus program leaders to determine the programs' goals and evaluate the execution of these programs in meeting those goals.

Giang and Briana Pam Anan, metadata management librarian, were acquainted with each other as they were part of the same tenure-track faculty cohort at CPP. Because of the real-life interaction and assessment requirements for the Program Evaluation course, Giang approached Anan and inquired whether the librarians would be willing to mentor a team of 4–6 of his students and allow them to evaluate one of the library's programs. At the time, the library was offering workshops on a variety of topics, including APA Citation Style. Anan agreed and partnered with Research and Instruction Librarian Jennifer Bidwell, who taught the APA Citation Style workshops, to have the workshops reviewed by the student team. As a result, the student team was responsible for making the initial contact with the librarians, arranging meetings, creating an assessment tool or survey for the workshops, distributing this survey at the end of the workshop sessions, and analyzing the data from the survey. All these activities culminated in the students' final written report and oral presentation.

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Throughout this evaluation and assessment process, we as library faculty, in partnership with Giang, mentored the student teams by offering guidance on interview techniques, professional communication, assessment tool creation and dissemination, and data analysis. We worked with one student team each semester in Fall 2019, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2022.

The project: Faculty-student mentorship

The faculty-student mentorship began in Fall 2019 when the first group of students contacted us to schedule a series of meetings and to develop an assessment for the APA Citation workshop. Our initial meeting was a blend of a "meet and greet" as well as a "reference interview" for the team to discern the workshop's needs (e.g., best days and times to host the workshop, better marketing strategies, and whether the workshop was effective). We, as their clients, wanted input on improvements to the content of the workshop and strategies for increasing attendance. We were concerned that the workshop's content was too dense and comprehensive for one workshop. In collaboration with the team, we designed the assessment according to these needs.

Although the assessment varied from semester to semester, it was designed to capture student status (e.g., class year, major, etc.); feedback on day, time, and format preferences; usefulness of the content; and effectiveness of the librarian's teaching style. Each semester we met with the team periodically to review the draft of the assessment, provide feedback to the team, and discuss the logistics for distributing the survey during the workshop. The student teams created unique assessments for the APA workshops conducted in Fall 2019, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, and Spring 2022. Our project concluded at the end of Spring 2022 because of Bidwell's departure to the University of San Diego.

Table 1. Summary of APA Citation Workshops from Fall 2019–Spring 2022

Semester	Library Workshop Title	Number of Attendees
Fall 2019	APA Citation (2 workshops)	7 attendees (In-person)
Spring 2021	Citing Your Sources: APA Style (7th Ed.) (1 workshop)	20 attendees (+186% increase) (Virtual)
Fall 2021	APA Style (7th Ed.): In-Text Citations APA Style (7th Ed.): References	38 attendees (+90% increase) (Virtual)
Spring 2022	APA Style (7th Ed.): In-Text Citations APA Style (7th Ed.): References	34 attendees (+70% increase) (Virtual)

The student teams wrote a final report on the results of the workshop evaluation to satisfy one of the requirements for their final project. They also provided us with a copy of the report. At the end of the semester, the team gave an oral presentation of their evaluation of the APA workshops at Giang's Program Evaluation Symposium. All campus partners, including the library, were invited to attend. The students presented both quantitative and qualitative data that reinforced the strengths of the workshops as well as areas that needed improvement. This partnership was especially advantageous for planning future workshops.

Findings and discussion

The final reports from the student teams consisted of the overall learning outcomes of the workshops, the purpose of the evaluation, project management, data management,

findings, data analysis, and suggestions and recommendations. Based on the suggestions from the student teams as well as data from the oral presentation and written report, Bidwell redesigned the workshop to align more closely with the student learning outcomes. Because of this faculty-student partnership, the following improvements were made:

1. The APA workshop was converted to an online format beginning in Spring 2021, due to the pandemic and work/learn-from-home mandate and remained virtual for the other workshops.
2. The APA workshop was split into two separate workshops: In-Text Citations and References.
3. The workshop slides were reworked and improved to target in-text or references skills in more depth.
4. Pre-test questions were added to the LibCal registration form, in which students told us their citation questions prior to the workshops to have their specific needs addressed live. For example, the registration form for the APA workshops included questions such as "What questions do you have about in-text citations?" and "What questions do you have about creating references?"

These changes increased attendance because of the required delivery method of going virtual and by allowing more time for questions and a focused discussion on a specific skill (e.g., in-text citations, references) of APA citation. We saw a 186 percent increase from Fall 2019 to Spring 2021 from 7 to 20 attendees. We also saw a 90 percent increase in attendees (38 attendees) from one workshop in Spring 2021 to two workshops in Fall 2021. In the Spring 2022, the registration for the workshop dropped slightly, but we continued to see an increase in attendees of 70 percent (34 attendees) from Spring 2021. This data suggests that the workshops were gaining traction with students. This upward trend can be explained by the redesign of the workshops from one to two as well as the student-centered approach, where student attendees dictated the topics for discussion and had more time for questions.

To increase attendance, the student teams also pointed out a major area for improvement—marketing of workshops. The teams recommended four areas to increase attendance:

1. Collaborate with teaching faculty to offer extra credit for attending the workshop.
2. Incentivize attendance by hosting a gift card raffle or free food and drinks.
3. Host the workshops more frequently throughout the semester.
4. Publicize the workshops more extensively through the various library social media platforms.

Conclusion

The results of this mentorship and collaboration with the student teams were an exciting development from this project. These instructional design improvements, based on actual student feedback, made the workshops more beneficial for future students, attendance for the workshops increased over time, and the student reports became more professional, organized, structured, and detailed.

Our most important takeaway from this partnership, in addition to improved library workshops, is that through the mentorship that we provided to the students, in addition to the guidance they received from their professor, we played a role in their professional

development and future academic or career goals. They collected raw data through their survey instrument, provided assessments and recommendations based on their analysis of that data, and presented that data not only to us but to their peers, their professor, and other academics and professionals across campus. These students now had a report to show to potential employers or graduate schools. They could apply those same skills to other data-related projects. They could speak of their experience of conducting program evaluation with professionals in their future job or admissions interviews. They improved their professional communication skills through interactions with us during in-person meetings, virtual meetings, and over email. The student teams helped enhance the effectiveness of our library workshops and simultaneously had this opportunity to expand their skills needed beyond the classroom.

We reaffirmed that as librarians and library faculty, we also provide added value while partnering with and mentoring students on projects, events, and other curricular and co-curricular activities. This mentorship and teaching this type of transferable professional readiness complements our goal of teaching information literacy and critical thinking. Our role in mentoring students is integral to student success and career readiness as we support teaching faculty for projects like this one to empower our students to become lifelong learners and information creators. ✶

Notes

1. Michael Giang, "Syllabus: Program Evaluation + Activity," Psychology Department, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2019.

2. "Frequently Asked Questions," California Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2021, https://www.cpp.edu/polyx/resources/faq.shtml.