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CHAPTER 21 *

Sharing Student Research:

Student Colloquia at University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Camielle Crampsie and Kaya van Beynen

Introduction

University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP) has experienced substantial growth, evolving from a regional campus largely under the management of the University of South Florida (USF), to an autonomous and separately accredited institution within the USF system. During the 2015/16 academic year, USF St. Petersburg served nearly 5,000 students enrolled in twenty-four undergraduate and seventeen graduate degree programs. In 2014, USF St. Petersburg developed a new strategic mission across all academic units that emphasized undergraduate research and experiential learning. To complement this new strategic direction, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library (NPML) reasserted its role as an active partner in teaching, research, and learning for the students, faculty, and staff while identifying new avenues to contribute to the strategic goals of student research and fostering experiential learning. This chapter describes the inception and development of a successful student colloquia at USFSP's Poynter Library by placing this series within the broad-

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er context of how library professionals can nurture, sustain, and strengthen relationships between students and their professors, position the library in the center of scholarly life at the institution, connect student research activities with successful presentation techniques, build bridges between town and gown, and provide students with a platform to share their experiences.

Background

USFSP celebrates “Research Month” each April with a series of events ranging from panel discussions, faculty research lightning talks, and an undergraduate student poster symposium. The poster symposium seemed to focus more on secondary research rather than original primary research that USFSP undergraduate and graduate students have conducted with greater frequency in recent years. The library was not part of the poster symposium but identified an opportunity to develop a student presentation series designed to 1) offer a campus-based initiative to highlight original student research and 2) provide students with the experience of giving a professional presentation to a friendly audience. To fill this gap, the NPML launched a student research colloquium series.

The NPML Student Colloquium was organized as a monthly event during the fall and spring semesters, expanding beyond “Research Month.” Each session featured two to four students presenting their research in conference-style PowerPoint presentations. Individual presentations are approximately ten to fifteen minutes in length followed by a question-and-answer session. The librarians recruit student presenters, organize the colloquium, publicize the events internally and externally, and create a warm and welcoming experience for students, their peers, faculty, and the general public.

Originally, only student researchers were asked to participate. The majority of participants were undergraduate students engaged in original research or fieldwork, mostly from the Psychology, Anthropology, Environmental Science, and Florida Studies programs. However, the colloquium quickly expanded to highlight additional types of student work. Representative examples of this expansion include artwork created by an English/graphic design student, a reading of a play written by an English student, and an African news website created by a journalism student.

When librarians heard informally that students were increasingly participating in internships, civic engagement activities, and other forms of experiential learning, the student colloquium seemed like an ideal place for the students to talk about those experiences. For example, one colloquium featured student participants in a popular “Road to White House” course that required students to travel to New Hampshire to volunteer for the presidential primary candidates in the New Hampshire primary. Five students repre-

senting five different presidential campaigns spoke about their experiences. Other student colloquiums focusing on experiential learning gave students an opportunity to discuss their fieldwork experiences, such as the students who presented on their archaeological work in Belize and Ethiopia.

As the nature of original student work changes or expands with new programs and strategic focus, likewise the NPML student colloquium has continued to evolve. By presenting their research, fieldwork, or creative products, students share their knowledge and activities while the library continues to affirm its support of students and its place as the core of research and learning at the institution.

Partnerships

The library both hosts and coordinates the student colloquium. The colloquium is always held in the library presentation space and the library staff manages the setup and technology. Additionally, the library faculty work closely with colleagues across the colleges at USFSP to recruit participants so partnerships with student groups, individual faculty, Student Services/Student Affairs, and University Advancement are critical.

With Student groups

To develop the programs, librarians connect with students by using student-run social media portals, and connecting with disciplinary organizations, such as the anthropology and psychology student clubs. Students receive support from library liaisons and faculty mentors in developing their programs, locating resources to strengthen their presentations, and learning skills related to the academic enterprise that many students at larger institutions may not experience until entering graduate programs.

With Teaching and Research Faculty

After the first year of hosting the student colloquium, the librarians realized how important conversations with the teaching and research faculty were in discovering possible presenters for the colloquium. Networking is a crucial part to the success of this program. Near the end of the semester, faculty came to the library and asked if their students could present in the upcoming student research colloquia. Some of the faculty members had been approached earlier in the semester about their students presenting, but did not feel their students were ready yet. Other faculty had just heard about the colloquium and thought it would be a great opportunity for their students. This made organiz-

ing presentations at the end of the semester, when students were finishing up projects, much easier for both the librarians and the students. This networking opportunity also gives the library and the teaching and research faculty the opportunity to be aware of our shared commitment to the academic experience. These conversations created awareness of areas in the library collection that required additional resources as well as providing for new opportunities for the library to increase services that are offered to benefit certain types of research and learning experiences. As the library already hosted a university digital archive that contained student work, creating a new collection based on the pictures and presentations from the student colloquium provided an opportunity for institutional preservation as well as an opportunity for students to be able to get their work out and share their accomplishments.

With the University Study Abroad Program:

The coordinator for the University Study Abroad program approached the librarians looking for a way to promote student exchanges and class trips abroad. This partnership benefited both sides: the library learned about a group of students that were happy to share the stories of their trips to France, Italy, Germany, and Vietnam while the colloquia helped the Study Abroad program spread the word about the opportunities to travel and learn about other cultures. Students discussed topics of food, wine, and German business strategies, and one student presented a film he made of his semester in France.

With University Advancement and Marketing Department:

Dissemination of student presentations occurs through a variety of forums to preserve student scholarship and as a public relations tool. When possible and appropriate, portions of the presentations become part of Digital USF-SP, an institutional repository that allows them to share research with others throughout the world. Only presentations where the student has full copyright are included, whereas presentations that include unpublished research, frequently in collaboration with faculty supervisors, do not get included in the archive. University Advancement uses the colloquia as a source for uplifting stories on student achievements; thus, the library's role in supporting student research is publicly celebrated in the local media and assists in the university's broader capital campaign. Additionally, this partnership has spilled over to library events beyond the student colloquium, as the university's public relations staff vigorously promote other library events and activities.

Reflection

Part of the intent of the student research colloquium is to showcase the wide range of research and projects being done by the USFSP community. After the first year of student presentations, librarians noticed an obvious gap in student presenters from the College of Business (COB). To better understand why, one of the librarians spoke to several COB faculty to try and identify possible students engaged with original research. The conversations with COB faculty led to a clearer understanding of the needs of the students, the resources they use in their research, and how the colloquia could benefit the COB. Instead of conducting qualitative or quantitative research, many of the COB students worked with community organizations on applied research, such as developing marketing plans, branding campaigns, gap analysis, etc. Not wanting to neglect the students' product from an entire college, the librarians expanded the colloquium focus to include these presentations. A marketing campaign developed by a student for a nearby farmer's market became the first COB student presentation resulting from this expanded effort. Highlighting presentations of community engagement work also helped to align the colloquium with the university's strategic goal of partnerships and the university's commitment to the local community.

Florida Studies is an interdisciplinary program of distinction at USFSP, and many of the students frequently work with librarians on locating unique archival and historical materials. In the process of visiting the library's Special Collections and University Archives, some of the students have learned about the colloquia experience and have shared their research on topics such as the history of stock car racing in Florida and the narrative descriptions of early Spanish conquistadors.

As the library is the center of all of the programs at the university, we strive to recruit presenters representing a broad spectrum of programs. It is always very special when we have presenters from very disparate programs present within the same colloquium, especially when the presenters and audience engage with each other, find commonality as students and scholars, and have fun learning about something new. Within just one program, it is evident just how diverse the interests and research areas are at USFSP.

Student and faculty collaborative research is an initiative the university seeks to institutionalize and the student research colloquium serves as an outlet to spread the word about the work the faculty members and the students do together. As such, the NPML colloquia helps to bring to light that undergraduate students have an important role in faculty scholarship, aiding in data collection, analysis, and other elements of research.

The student research colloquium has also helped to build a strong sense of community at USFSP. Learning about the undergraduate research experiences has inspired new students to get involved in research. When students

lack awareness of research opportunities, they may not know that such opportunities exist for their interests. The colloquium helps fill a void and meet the undergraduate research and experiential learning goals of the university while also preparing undergraduates for graduate programs. As some graduate programs require undergraduate research experience as a requirement for entry, participation in the colloquium gives students another way of demonstrating participation in undergraduate research other than publishing.

The NPML colloquia has also given students a platform for sharing their stories and experiences. Providing this opportunity boosts student self-confidence as well as rewards and acknowledges the work they have accomplished. It shows that students are making connections in their community and gaining new experiences, and in some cases, building international relationships. The presentations demonstrate the array of opportunities available for students to experience in and beyond the classroom and hearing student stories can act as testimonials to the reach and impact of USFSP.

Assessment

Throughout, the librarians involved in the NPML Student Colloquium have assembled a growing array of metrics to document participation and impact. Similar to all events, the marketing librarian tracked number of student presenters and colloquium attendance. Based on these metrics, the team was not sure whether efforts to find student presenters and organize the colloquium were worth the event attendance, so it was unclear whether the library would continue the program. However, despite being a pilot program, the student colloquium had received extremely positive attention from the university administration.

The next year, the librarians involved decided to continue the student colloquium, but to track additional benefits to the library and university. These additional benefits included positive media mention of the library. University Advancement came to rely on the colloquium as an easy way to find up-lifting stories about USFSP student achievements. As such, the library received great publicity on the university website, the student newspaper, and in the university e-newsletters. In addition, students, particularly from the anthropology, English, and biology programs, started to use the colloquium as a place to practice before presenting their research at a local, state, and even one international conference. Thus, the students could present their work in a less stressful forum, receive feedback, and improve their presentation before communicating at a more professional conference.

One unexpected but tangible benefit of the NPML Student Colloquium was connecting students to university donors. Thus far, two university donors have visited the colloquium to see the student research that they either already

funded or that they intended to sponsor. The first donor sponsored a student trip to Spain for the student to spend the summer doing research at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. The colloquium provided a forum for the donor to see the outcome of her donation and provided University Advancement with a photograph and news story of the student thanking the donor. The second connection came after a group of students had conducted research measuring the university's solar energy use. The faculty supervisor identified a potential donor, but needed a forum to persuade the donor to fund the students' travel to a conference in Paris, France. The NPML Student Colloquium provided this forum, and at the end of the students' presentation, the donor agreed to fund the conference travel. Both opportunities are examples of reasons why getting the word out about the colloquium, particularly to University Advancement, is so important. Because the library has the ability to bring students, faculty, university advancement, and community members together in a congenial forum, we send the message to the university administration and the community that we are an essential partner in supporting undergraduate research.

Recommendations/Best Practices

Through trial and error, we have come up with a list of best practices that guide our implementation and management of the Student Colloquia. Use these suggested recommendations to guide your own student research presentation series:

- Document presentation guidelines. Have a form that clearly outlines the presentation format and the hardware and software capacity of the presentation space.
- Regularly touch base with faculty. Key faculty frequently have undergraduate students doing original research; however, these faculty might not have the library and the student colloquium at the front of their minds. Informal conversations are a great way for the librarians to stay abreast of new student projects and remind faculty of the student colloquium.
- Keep a long-term vision on when students are willing and able to present. At the start of the research cycle, a student usually needs to do a thorough literature review—a phase where many students approach a librarian for research help. In contrast, students only want to present when they have nearly completed their analysis and writing. A long-term vision should keep in mind that today's help-seeking students might become tomorrow's presenters.
- Be flexible with dates and times. Originally, the student colloquium took place on the second Wednesday of the month at noon, but after the first year of low attendance, the colloquium adapted for more

flexible scheduling. This made it easier to secure presenters, increase audience attendance, and attract nontraditional and commuter students. Additionally, the Doodle Polls scheduling tool helped coordinate the availability of multiple presenters.

- Timing is everything. The end of the semester is easier to get presenters because research projects are nearing completion and students feel more prepared to present.
- Partnership goes both ways. Take good quality photos of the presenters, their supervisors, and the audience. Share these photos with the partnering departments and with university advancement so that they too can claim credit while enabling other areas of the university to tell the library's story.
- Archive evidence of the student colloquium. Items to archive may include student PowerPoint slides, marketing flyers, other documents provided, and photographs from the event. Provide release forms or secure permissions from presenters before publicizing or placing content in the institutional repository. This collection tells the story of the library's effort into the future. Additionally, opportunities may arise when evidence of the library's activities to support student work will be needed to promote the library or the university in the future.

Conclusion

While the monthly Student Colloquiums usually only feature two presenters with an average of twenty people in the audience, these examples document the program's positive impact on the growth of the students' understanding, publicity for the library, and university fundraising efforts. Working in partnership with people and departments across the university, the Nelson Poynter Memorial library is able to successfully recruit student speakers eager to share their stories of research, field work, study abroad, and experiential learning. By providing a conduit for students to share their original research and experiential learning activities, the library truly becomes the center of scholarly life at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

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