

Jennifer Jarson and Kate Morgan

From concept to creation

Shaping inquiry culture on campus with a co-curricular panel

How can a campus promote a culture of inquiry? How can students' awareness of behaviors and attitudes involved in inquiry be cultivated? How can barriers between faculty/staff and students be reduced? Our experience developing a co-curricular, interdisciplinary panel discussion series spotlights how librarians and instructional designers shape inquiry culture on campus through programming.

In this series, panelists share a behind-the-scenes look at their scholarly, creative, and professional pursuits. Rather than focusing on polished final products and achievements, they highlight the inner workings and rough edges of their processes thereby describing knowledge practices and dispositions that are key to inquiry experiences. Increasing the transparency of their component parts makes these experiences more accessible to students. This article discusses the context that motivated the development of this programming series, our implementation process, reflections on the series' impact, and adaptations we made for the remote environment.

Context and program goals

We developed the "From Concept to Creation: Uncovering the Making of Scholarly and Creative Accomplishments" series for our small commuter campus in the Pennsylvania State University system. More than 75% of our approximately 1,000 students are employed and one in five work 30 or more hours per week, typically at off-campus jobs. Moreover, approximately 37% are first-generation college students. The campus offers ten bachelor's

degree programs as well as the first two years of more than 275 programs that can be completed at other Penn State campuses. Many students spend one or two years at our campus before moving on to continue their degree at another campus in the system. The need to balance work, family, and academic priorities shapes students' experiences and may inhibit their on-campus time.

In spring 2018, we conducted five focus groups with campus faculty and staff in order to foster community and conversation around successes, challenges, and barriers with teaching and learning related to information literacy and digital literacy. Participants expressed concerns about students' passivity in their own learning, as well as students' lack of understanding of the research process and self-confidence to engage in research. Participants also expressed a desire for more intra-campus communication around engaging students in academic inquiry. At the same time, participants' remarks suggested some uncertainty about and discomfort with their own information literacy, digital literacy, and related skills.

The development of the "From Concept to Creation" program has been informed by

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our context and focus group findings, aiming to strengthen students' connections to the campus community and empower students to participate in academic inquiry. The series has engaged our campus in conversations around the processes and practices that ultimately result in creative and academic accomplishments. By increasing the transparency of steps, skills, habits, and attitudes, we have sought to reduce barriers between faculty/staff and students and make accomplishments and professional paths feel more approachable for students. With these conversations, we have strived to activate students' awareness of the skills and attitudes embedded in the process, thereby raising the visibility of information literacy and digital literacy skills, promoting reflection on their own processes, and encouraging participation.

Program implementation

We launched the "From Concept to Creation" series in fall 2018. The series has included two hour-long panel sessions per semester with two to three panelists per session. An average of 62 students, faculty, and staff attended each session. In each session, panelists selected professional path(s) (e.g., entry to college or graduate school) or piece(s) of scholarship or creative work and discussed some aspects of their development. Each session also featured a question-and-answer session.

We initially invited faculty and staff to volunteer to serve as panelists via campus-wide emails, but ultimately found targeting invitations to specific faculty and staff to be a more effective method of recruitment. In the beginning, we were most attentive to recruiting panelists with diverse disciplinary affiliations and roles on campus (e.g., the campus art gallery director and an associate professor of sociology served as co-panelists in one session). As the series progressed, it increasingly became a priority to also consider panelists' diversity with respect to other factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender.

In preparing for each session, we met with each panelist to discuss goals and format, and to share with them a brief guide that we developed for their reference. This guide featured techni-

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cal details and, importantly, sample prompts for panelists to consider as they prepared their remarks such as: How did you take your first steps? How did you ask questions? How did you identify a path for your research? How did you draw conclusions? How did your work change course during the process? What attitudes were important to your process? What skills and tools were key to your process? What were your hesitations, fears, and missteps? and How did you manage/overcome them? All panelists chose to use slides to accompany their remarks.

We promoted each session in the series primarily via email announcements to faculty, staff, and students, as well as flyers and social media posts. Additionally, we posted announcements in the learning management system course in which Honors students were automatically enrolled. We also specifically asked faculty teaching in areas that aligned with panelists' disciplinary affiliations for their help in encouraging students to attend. Many of these faculty offered students extra credit for attending.

Each session ran 60 minutes and observed the following general outline: brief introduction of the series' themes and goals, introduction of first panelist, first panelist's remarks, introduction of second panelist, second panelist's remarks, and a facilitated question-and-answer segment. We experimented with three panelists in one session early on but determined that we did not have sufficient time for a quality question-and-answer segment with that model. From that point forward, each session featured two panelists.

In fall 2019, we added a brief reflective activity¹ to wrap around the panel sessions in order to stimulate attendees' thinking about

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the series' themes: process and inquiry. To start, attendees drew a representation (e.g., illustration, outline, or flow chart) of their process in a journey of discovery in a domain in which they might already have some familiarity or relatable experience (e.g., write an article/research paper, learn a new skill or technology tool, choose a major, take a hard class, understand a difficult concept). Their representation could incorporate anything related to the process including, for example, sparks, steps forward and/or backward, tools, key moments of discovery or understanding, and emotions. Then participants responded to a reflection prompt: What do you notice about the steps, skills, habits, and attitudes that are or would be important to your process? After the panelists' remarks and question-and-answer period, participants again reflected on their process with the same prompt.

Reflections and impact

Panelists generally chose to share stories related to their professional paths rather than discrete research or creative projects. They frequently talked about their early and adult life experiences, their experiences as undergraduates, and their transitions to graduate school. While panelists spoke less about research strategies and tools than we had originally hoped, they spoke in great depth and detail about choices they made, attitudes they cultivated, and cross-pollination between personal and professional interests and decisions. In so doing, they illustrated skills, practices, and attitudes key to information literacy and digital literacy development such as developing expertise and understanding authority, negotiating affective aspects of their research and writing processes,

navigating ambiguity, formulating questions, searching for clues and connections, synthesizing ideas, and honing their mindsets for curiosity, inquiry, and reflection.

Our analysis of the reflection activity artifacts, collected from approximately 200 attendees in the fall 2019 sessions, offers insights into how students characterize and conceptualize inquiry, and how transparent discussion about inquiry processes as presented in this series impacts their thinking about their own steps, skills, and attitudes. We analyzed the artifacts using a grounded theory approach² in three phases to identify patterns: independent grounded analysis to identify shared themes, independent coding for selected themes, and norming.

Analysis suggests that attendees articulated the role of failure in new ways after participating in the program, coming to frame it as a natural part of the process and often a fruitful catalyst. Their reflections revealed heightened awareness of the role of community, as well as attitudes important in inquiry processes: curiosity, persistence, and self-awareness. After participating in the program, attendees also incorporated new concepts related to inquiry in their reflections, suggesting that participating in the sessions enhanced or expanded their awareness.

Essential teaching and learning partners

Librarians and instructional designers are frequently perceived as playing a supporting role in our campus communities, yet our expertise in information literacy and digital literacy is vital to our institutions' teaching and research missions. However, these domains are not the purview of librarians and instructional designers alone. We believe it is our role to build community among our stakeholders and to grow and deepen shared investment in these areas. Moreover, we are uniquely situated at the intersections of many points in our campus landscapes. Our experience navigating relationships between faculty and student, faculty and faculty, discipline and discipline, research and practice, and tools and users

helps us translate and connect across divides of perspectives, stakeholders, and disciplines. As such, we are well-positioned to shape campus culture in these core areas. Embracing the range of our role strengthens our voices in campus conversations and our positions as essential teaching and learning partners in the higher education landscape.

Transitioning online

Like most institutions, our campus was forced to abruptly pivot to remote teaching in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing that adjusting to our new context required significant time and effort for all members in our community and left little attention for co-curricular activities, we canceled spring 2020 events in the series.

While the effects of the pandemic on teaching, research, and life have persisted, we decided to restart the “From Concept to Creation” series in spring 2021. In keeping with the spirit of the series, we elected to use this platform to promote transparency and foster conversation around the challenges of academic inquiry in such times. As such, we recruited panelists to share their experiences and perspectives on how the pandemic and the remote work context have impacted the process of their scholarly and creative work. We offered panelists revised guiding questions to help them prepare their remarks: How has our new context impacted your process? How is your work changing course because of our new context? What skills and tools have been key to your process in this context? and What habits or attitudes have been important to your process in this context?

We also adjusted the format to promote an intimate community experience despite being restricted to online delivery. In advance of the session, panelists selected their favorites from the list of guiding questions. We developed the framework for the session around their preferences, and each took turns responding. As facilitators, we provided opening and closing remarks, introduced each question in turn, and made connections between panelists’ commentary. We also integrated questions submitted by

audience members into the conversation when relevant and appropriate. This adapted format helped set a lively and conversational tone, which fostered audience participation.

Conclusion

This co-curricular panel discussion series has engaged students, faculty, and staff in conversations about inner workings and rough edges of inquiry experiences. In each session, panelists highlighted knowledge practices and dispositions key to their processes such as: developing expertise, negotiating affective aspects, navigating ambiguity and failure, and honing reflective mindsets. By uncovering the making of scholarly and creative accomplishments, this series stimulated campus conversation around inquiry processes. Increasing the transparency of component parts made inquiry experiences and the embedded information literacy and digital literacy skills and dispositions more visible to students and, as a result, invited students to identify a place for themselves in the process.

Because information literacy and digital literacy are not the purview of librarians and instructional designers alone, we believe it is our role to build community on our campus around our shared investment in these critical domains. This series has helped to uncover how information literacy and digital literacy are embedded in the fabric of academic work and our community, and has also raised the profile of librarians and instructional designers as unique and integral teaching and learning partners.

Notes

1. Jennifer Jarson, “A Bird’s Eye View of the Research Process: Developing Students’ Attention to Research Practices, Iterations, and Inquiry” in *Framing Information Literacy: Teaching Grounded in Theory, Pedagogy, and Practice*, ed. Mary K. Oberlies and Janna Mattson (Chicago: ACRL, 2018), 17–29.

2. Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 2023–27. ¶¶