

# Programming as Pedagogy in the Academic Library

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**abstract:** This paper considers library programming as a means of extending and enhancing the academic library's pedagogical mission and role in student success. Scholarly programming in the form of faculty speakers, film screenings, or other kinds of research-based events creates opportunities for students to join an academic community and to practice critical thinking skills learned in class. These presentations inscribe the library within the students' journey from student to scholar, highlighting its importance as a nexus for scholarly exchange. At the same time, this programming strengthens the library's mission by encouraging engagement with the campus, interdisciplinary research, and efforts to support diversity and inclusion. Drawing on the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and concepts in critical thinking in the liberal arts, this paper examines the role of programming in the academic library's instructional and formative mission. Library programming can help students become informationally literate, thoughtful consumers and producers of content.

## Introduction

Academic library programming is an important means of promoting the library, of helping to create a community, and of offering information and services to the campus and surrounding area. Programming can be grant-supported or the result of an institutional financial commitment. Often, however, such presentations are a product of staff time, collaboration, patience, and creativity that requires few or no financial resources. Programming in academic libraries takes many different forms, including workshops, speaker events, orientations, social gatherings, wellness presentations, film screenings, and other forms of outreach and engagement. These events are an opportunity to invite people into the library and to encourage them to see library faculty and staff as partners in their research and learning, whether or not the program in question has an overtly pedagogical emphasis. Such offerings, while not inherently instructional, are, nevertheless, intrinsically related to the library's mission of supporting student success. Programming seeks to give the library an accessible public face. Research-centric programming,

*portal: Libraries and the Academy*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2020), pp. 425–434.

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in which scholarship is presented and discussed, is also an opportunity to define the library, to engage with the academic community, and to promote interdisciplinarity. Students are encouraged to view their learning as continuous with the research process

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and to regard the library as a nexus for scholarship and the exchange of knowledge. At its best, the library is an intellectual space at the heart of the process by which students become scholars. Offering students

access to academic content and scholarly discussion, it invites and encourages their participation in ways that are consistent with the missions of many libraries to promote diversity and inclusivity. In this way, research-based and other academic programming functions as a core component of information literacy and scholarly engagement while allowing the library to enhance its responsiveness, diversity, and role on campus.

### Literature Review

The literature on academic library programming is diverse, and speaks to a breadth of motivations, goals, and outcomes in outreach and instruction events. Some are planned with the aim of creating and promoting the library as a welcoming, supportive space, a necessary first step in encouraging students to see it as a partner in their academic experience. Carole Ann Fabian, Charles D'Aniello, Cynthia Tysick, and Michael Morin, writing in 2003, address the importance of programming in maintaining the relevance of the physical library in the face of increased usage of digital collections and decreased usage of print holdings.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, Jamie Seeholzer presented a case study of social events at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, held to publicize the library and rebrand it as a more inviting space. Seeholzer notes the challenges this model poses to the perception of the library as an academic entity.<sup>2</sup> Some library programming takes the form of reading groups and book talks, linking socially based events with traditionally academic ones. Light-hearted presentations are still a vital conduit to informational awareness. Mary Snyder Broussard describes a Harry Potter Night held annually, noting that it has been a good outreach tool to students interested in the books and movies.<sup>3</sup>

Events with an overtly social tone can help to make the library more accessible and raise its profile on campus. They are complemented and extended by curriculum-focused programming intended to more directly serve the instructional and engagement mission of the library. Lucinda Rush describes an event at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, to educate students enrolled in information literacy programs about the information landscape and fake news. The program was a panel featuring local journalists and faculty and students from the university. Noted successes included favorable responses to the assessment questionnaire, increased awareness among librarians of their role in this conversation, and bolstering of the relationships between librarians and the campus.<sup>4</sup> Leanne Hillery and Harold Henkel describe a Big Read event, supported by a National Endowment for the Arts grant, which allowed the library to create programming around a single text, in partnership with campus and noncampus entities, including Naval Station Norfolk in Norfolk, Virginia. The program focused on increasing readership, which



is widely held to be an important component of a student's educational development and the mission of the academic library.<sup>5</sup> Though not explicitly curricular, such programming clearly supports both the library's and the university's goals of advancing student engagement and achievement. A presentation designed to complement the first-year Common Reader program at York College, City University of New York—depicted by Anamika Megwalu, Christina Miller, and Cynthia Haller—is an example of more explicitly curricular engagement. The Common Reader program is designed to give students, faculty, and staff a shared reading experience that they can all discuss.<sup>6</sup> Katherine Stephan describes a series of research café events at Liverpool John Moores University in the United Kingdom intended to engage the university and the public by offering research talks for a general audience. This model serves to link the library to the campus and to the broader community, and even to help people find collaborators. In addition, students who attend are exposed to different fields and research strategies.<sup>7</sup> Alex Watson discusses the National Novel Writing Month events at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, which fostered academic and community engagement while also helping participants to acquire important skills.<sup>8</sup> Joe Clark positions programming at the crossroads of outreach and engagement, using it to raise the profile of a newly reopened library. These events engage with, but do not compete with, others held by curricular entities and departments. Such offerings provide a way of ensuring that the library is seen as a partner in research and education, while simultaneously contributing substantively to the scholarly life of the campus.<sup>9</sup> R. David Lankester has written extensively with various teams of coauthors about the role of the library in the scholarly discourse of the campus and about the implications for the ethics of the individual librarian and the profession. This understanding of library programming situates it as part of the core function of the library as an academic and pedagogical entity.<sup>10</sup> Hikaru Nakano summarizes the value of invited speakers in student education and the role that librarians can play in organizing speaker events. The presentations in question were intended to publicize the Asian Studies program at the University of Florida in Gainesville by engaging with students and with the community. She encountered resistance from library colleagues, who felt that such programming was outside the library's purview, but not from teaching faculty. Nakano argues that librarians have a place in instruction and academic engagement beyond the teaching of information literacy, placing a premium on speaker events as a way to put students in touch with information.<sup>11</sup> Fred Willie Zemetkin LaPolla and Denis Rubin describe a series of "Data Visualization Clinics" intended as crowdsourced workshops to help library users learn new skills in data visualization and connect with others interested in this technique.<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Andrews recounts successes and failures related to academic programming geared toward students, highlighting the importance of partnering with faculty to reach them. Faculty have an important role to play in recognizing content relevant to their students' coursework and in encouraging them to attend library programs. Furthermore, Andrews emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary scope in attracting a large and diverse audience.<sup>13</sup>

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In addition to supporting students' development as informationally literate researchers and scholars, the library has a mission to promote diversity and to advocate for an inclusive intellectual environment. As a locus of scholarly exchange on campus, the library is an ideal place for diversity-related programming. Stephanie Everett describes an initiative called The Race Card Project, in which participants were invited to write thoughts about race on a card and affix it to a wall in the library. This project was used to start a conversation about race with the library as a safe space free of conflict or criticism, and to inform future programming.<sup>14</sup> Eva Scippa emphasizes the importance of diverse partnerships and collaborations in her discussion of the decision by Alfred University in Alfred, New York, to host "Harry Potter's World," a traveling exhibition from the National Library of Medicine. The display was an opportunity to engage with diverse campus groups as well as community organizations.<sup>15</sup> Del Williams and Mark Stover describe a spoken word and hip-hop event in the Oviatt Library at California State University, Northridge to increase the diversity of library programming in a way that is responsive to the interests of the student body.<sup>16</sup> Such presentations play an important role in supporting a diverse and inclusive environment, while also allowing the library to extend the intellectual life of students by providing a forum for expression and communication in ways that complement, enhance, and question the courses they take.

### Library Programming and Students

Academic library programming that focuses on curricular and cocurricular engagement provides an opportunity to extend concepts taught in an information literacy context and to allow students to see them in action. These goals are consistent with key tenets of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. The importance of introducing students to a broader context of scholarly inquiry and exchange is reflected in the Framework statement "Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations."<sup>17</sup>

Informationally literate students are capable not only of succeeding in their coursework but also of joining an intellectual conversation and making meaningful contributions to it. One of the most important components of this transition from student

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to scholar is learning the praxis of "Research as Inquiry" and the ways in which information is synthesized and exchanged. Students encounter these concepts in a variety of ways. Reading for class, directed by an instructor, gives them information necessary to understand the concerns and theoretical engagements

of a field. In-class lectures provide a more focused lens through which to interpret this information, helping students to understand not just the important concepts but also how to identify them. Finally, assignments and exams teach learners to distill and synthesize



information. Through in-class instruction or library information literacy sessions, students learn to perform research and to engage with existing scholarship in meaningful and responsible ways. This process is served by thoughtfully chosen readings, instructional design, and library engagement. It can also be meaningfully enhanced through the creation of an intellectual community in which students can participate in low-stakes ways to exercise the competencies they acquire in class in a more self-directed, creative manner. The library's interdisciplinarity and

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its vital role in the research process make it an excellent place for this participation, and programming provides the forum. Students see researchers, perhaps even their own instructors, communicating work outside an explicitly pedagogical context.

Indeed, the library is particularly important in the context of interdisciplinary research. As Maralyn Jones observes, students engaged in interdisciplinary learning and research need to grasp the language, praxis, and concepts of one or more fields before they can undertake meaningful research. She compares the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (a precursor of the ACRL Framework) to characteristics of interdisciplinary research advanced by Allen Repko, finding significant conceptual overlaps.<sup>18</sup> Obviously, not all teaching and scholarship that students encounter are overtly interdisciplinary in scope. However, even work clearly situated in one discipline will likely abut other areas, and the very act of preparing students to work within a discipline implies a need for them to understand that field of study in the context of others. Lisa Lattuca, Lois Voight, and Kimberly Fath (cited in Jones) note that students master a discipline by learning its "language." This process is served by reading, course lectures, and information literacy training for keyword formation.<sup>19</sup> It is greatly improved by the presentation of scholarly forums at the library in which students encounter the language of one or more disciplines, and in which they actively participate as audience members, questioners, discussion participants, or even presenters. Interdisciplinary programming may also take the form of panel discussions in which scholars and students from multiple disciplines address a single question.

Many libraries create programming in an environment of financial scarcity, making resource-light events a priority. Programs structured around faculty speakers serve the dual purposes of creating a forum for high-quality scholarly content and doing so without a dedicated budget. By working with faculty speakers on campus, librarians have an opportunity to build relationships with researchers outside the consultation and collection development process. They can engage with all phases of the faculty member's research by providing a forum in which the work can be disseminated as a public talk. This exposure can be especially appealing to faculty members who are interested in cultivating their roles as public intellectuals, particularly if events are advertised to the wider community. Encouraging faculty speakers to invite their students guarantees an audience and allows students to see their professor's work from another angle.<sup>20</sup> Because these presentations often focus on research, they might complement course content while

extending it to a broader research context. Students benefit from encountering this material and from participating in a different kind of forum. Faculty speaker events are, after

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all, library programming, and as such may draw a diverse audience of students, staff, faculty, and community members. Because of this diversity, student attendees have an opportunity to participate in a scholarly forum and learn how to engage productively and respectfully in an intellectual exchange using the skills learned in class and

in library instruction. This makes their training more real, allowing them to see how the concepts they have been taught can function in a real-world scholarly context. At the same time, the familiar environment of the library helps to make the experience more accessible and less stressful. Students who visit the library for the first time to hear their professor speak may encounter it as a space for scholarship, community, and growth.

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In addition to faculty speaker events, academic library programming is also an opportunity to showcase student work. Student speakers build scholarly competencies by learning how to present information they have researched, as well as new knowledge they are contributing to a scholarly conversation. Presentation is a skill, and one that challenges many students. The opportunity for students to demonstrate what they have learned in a library setting elevates the experience from a class presentation and encourages them to take ownership of their work as scholarship. At the same time, panel discussions and short talks help to demystify the experience of presenting one's findings and opinions. Furthermore, a student's preexisting comfort with the library and librarians can make the presentation less stressful.

Student talks also help to build relationships between students and the library. This is especially true of library programming created in partnership with student organizations. The library provides a forum for the student group and its work, while also learning more about the needs of that group and its constituency. Such events speak to the very heart of library engagement in the student experience.

Library programming also enhances students' learning by providing opportunities to engage with cocurricular academic content they might not encounter in their courses. The library can contribute to the breadth of students' academic experience and provide a forum for diverse ideas on campus by creating thoughtful, inclusive programming. Such programming exposes students to a breadth of content that can complement, expand, or even problematize the materials they study in their courses. This broadening of horizons aligns with the library's mission as a nexus for research and information exchange on campus.



In addition to research presentations, library events can include, promote, and engage with a variety of perspectives and stories. The library might sponsor film screenings, in which students have the opportunity to view films and participate in moderated discussion, or text-based events, such as literary karaoke, a competition in which participants read passages from favorite books. Such programs are valuable forms of engagement because they put students in direct contact with the library's collections. Although library collections are intended to support student work throughout their time at the university, the materials are often

underutilized by students who are uncomfortable navigating them or may not see them as an accessible resource. Film screenings expose students to important content, while also functioning as a pathway to future encounters with the library's media collections. Literary karaoke events invite students to explore the library's book collection in a fun and engaging way. Such programming helps students to discover the library's holdings and reframes the collection as a source not only of information but also of recreational reading and inspiration.

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### Programming and the Library

All library programming, whether for outreach and awareness or explicitly for curricular engagement, is pertinent to the goal of raising consciousness of the library's vital role in student development and success. Programming also helps ensure that the library evolves in ways necessary to provide this student support. Academic presentations, intended to complement and extend students' curricular experience, speak directly to the library's primacy in a liberal arts education as a place where students take ownership of their scholarship by assimilating course content and using it to synthesize new information. Many academic libraries do not offer credit-bearing courses. However, the research and learning opportunities afforded by library collections, consultation services, one-shot instruction sessions, and workshops create a platform for students to develop their scholarly perspective both within and outside the framework of their courses. The ability to hear a multitude of voices is central to this development, and library programming, particularly presentations focused on experts and their knowledge, contributes to this goal. Lisa Tsui notes that the development of critical thinking, a crucial component of a liberal arts education, is served not only by course-based instruction but also by the creation of "a certain intellectual ethos that is fostered within classrooms and through the cocurriculum."<sup>21</sup> Academic library programming often creates cocurricular opportunities for students featuring faculty and student research. In this way, programming is both an extension of library education and, in a broader sense, a complement to the institution's larger mission of helping students to become critically aware of information and able to interrogate it.

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liminal spaces between disciplines. As students progress through their degree programs, the library is a resource to support their coursework, as well as a forum in which to expand their learning into areas of personal interest. Furthermore, the flexibility and intellectual openness of the library encourages the creation of connections between seemingly disparate areas of a student's work. Learning to view education from a remove

that enables one to see linkages and overlaps is vital to the progression from student to scholar. Programming that celebrates interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary affords students the opportunity to engage with learning in ways that depart from and complement the scholarly apparatus of their majors. As Jones notes, citing Lisa Lattuca, Lois Voigt, and Kimberly Fath, interdisciplinarity education is predicated on students' ability to assimilate a new disciplinary "language." The library has a role to play in this, both in the collections it makes available and in its ability to provide a forum for intra- and interdisciplinary exchange.

Broader exposure to research and scholarship outside of required courses and the confines of majors is vital to a more complete approach to information literacy. Librarians teaching one-shot information literacy courses face challenges in creating rapport with students, imparting all the information they would like to cover in limited time, and assessing the impact of their lessons on students' progress in that course and throughout their degree programs. Programming does not address assessment, but it provides opportunities for students to gain exposure to some of the key tenets of information literacy instruction and to continue to sharpen their skills of evaluating and contextualizing the information they encounter. This aspect of programming brings students into contact with an additional element of the ACRL Framework, "Research as Inquiry." It states, "Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in

any field."<sup>22</sup> By watching researchers present works in progress or finished texts, students see an important element of the research process which they themselves are learning.

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Finally, programming is an effective strategy for improving the library as an institution by promoting diversity within its services, collections, and spaces. Speaker programming

creates a forum for a variety of voices, fields, research modalities, and areas of inquiry. Other kinds of events, such as film screenings, allow the library to present and engage with diverse content to provoke reflection and discussion. An emphasis on collection-focused programming to promote diversity has the additional benefit of encouraging the library to develop collections that represent a wider variety of experiences, perspectives,





and modes of inquiry. By working with others on campus engaged in diversity work, libraries can add to their collections in a collaborative, responsive way. This further contributes to the library's relationships with other campus entities in ways that make the library more open, equitable, and inclusive. These values bolster the library's mission to support students' growth as scholars, while training them to think critically and thoughtfully about information in a diverse and dynamic world.

### Conclusions

In an era of unstable approaches to truth, budgetary constriction, and institutional change, library programming offers the dual benefit of being good for the student while also making the library stronger in ways that are vital to its mission. By creating programming focused on the practice and communication of research, librarians complement and extend their information literacy instruction while simultaneously inserting the library into the curriculum in a meaningful way. Students encounter the library as a resource and also as a locus for community, diversity, and exchange. This experience offers opportunities for critical thinking and engagement necessary to a successful transition from student to scholar, a journey which is vital to the formation of informationally literate, thoughtful members of a complicated world.

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