

LONG NIGHT AGAINST PROCRASTINATION: A COLLABORATIVE TAKE ON AN INTERNATIONAL EVENT

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The Long Night Against Procrastination is an international tutoring event created by the writing center at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany in 2010 (“Lange Nacht Der Aufgeschobenen Hausarbeiten”). The inaugural event was established by writing center staff in response to student requests for all-night tutoring support. Where lesser individuals would have chuckled in response to such a request, the writing center at European University Viadrina decided to give it a try. Writing center staff dubbed this event the Long Night Against Procrastination, or rather the *Lange Nacht Der Aufgeschobenen Hausarbeiten*, in German. This annual event has gained recognition and grown, spreading to writing centers at institutions such as DePaul University, University of Manitoba, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Naturally, the name of the event has been adjusted in response; the event is now *Weltweit* (or International) Long Night Against Procrastination.

At Waldorf College, the Writing Center is located within the Luise V. Hansen Library, which eased collaboration on co-hosting the first Long Night Against Procrastination event in the library space during the spring of 2013. Successful collaboration between the writing center and the library has since turned the Long Night events into one of the most popular and engaging semi-annual events on campus. The intent of organizing Long Night events was principally to provide students with support on their writing assignments by offering extended hours and tutors to assist with proofreading, citation style, and developing thesis statements. Librarians also participate in the event, providing students with assistance with locating and evaluating sources. This partnership event blends academic writing with research support, and ensures increased camaraderie between staff and students working on assignments late into the night.

One may well wonder how holding a night focused on procrastination avoids becoming an enabling event. In fact, encouraging students to work at the last minute for one night draws them into the library and writing center services in productive ways

that result in return visits at earlier stages of future projects. Writing center visit numbers have steadily grown since beginning the Long Night events at Waldorf, with visits up by 15% or more per semester. Many students don’t avail themselves of writing center or library assistance because they haven’t been shown the benefit; getting students in the door during Long Night events overcomes this barrier. Academic procrastination is common among college students, especially undergraduates learning to manage concurrent writing tasks, extracurricular activities, and social lives away from parental control. Long Night events can reduce student anxiety, encouraging them with timely academic support, fun, and access to resources that can help them accomplish the tasks at hand.

The Waldorf College Writing Center has a small staff (the director and eight tutors for the 2013-14 academic year) serving the entire student body. This limits how many students can be served during normal writing center hours, which are based on need, tutor availability, and the director’s schedule. All tutors typically work during the Long Night Against Procrastination event, providing a fully-staffed night of access and consequently serving a larger percentage of the student body. This proves particularly beneficial to fine arts students and athletes, whose practice and game times in the evening often prevent access to tutoring support. While professors and instructors encourage student participation in the Long Night events, we have found that many students find their way to writing center help during the event through the encouragement of friends and roommates as well.

Not only does the Long Night give students access to writing center tutoring staff, but it also provides access to library research assistance. Reference librarians are available to assist students with verifying the quality of source materials, locating additional scholarly resources for assignments, and using library guides for citation help and other needs. The events are beneficial in that they attract a number of first-time library users; students are often mandated to attend the event by an advisor or athletic coach, which provides students unfamiliar with the library an

opportunity to work one-on-one with a reference librarian to explore the resources available to them.

Organizing the Event

Through experience, we have determined that choosing an appropriate date for a Long Night event is the most significant factor in determining its success. At the Luise V. Hanson Library facility, Long Night events are organized by a team containing both library and writing center staff, led by the directors of those departments. For the first event organized at Waldorf College, our team chose to hold the event March 8, which closely coincided with the timing of the Long Night international event. Feedback from students and faculty later indicated that the date did not line up well with assignment due dates. In response to this, faculty were solicited to provide input prior to future events, in order to better align the Long Night event with assignment due dates. This communication proved to be essential to the success of subsequent Long Night events our team organized; in fact, several faculty members adjusted the due date of assignments to allow students to benefit from the event. The second Long Night event was later scheduled for mid-November 2013, and participation at this event was three times that of the first.

Another important consideration when planning a Long Night event is the length of time the event will run. How late is late enough? We found that Long Night events at other institutions concluded anywhere from midnight to the wee hours of the morning. The duration of the event may be dictated by the amount of personnel available to staff it. The first event organized at Waldorf College concluded at 3:00 a.m., at which point exhausted staff escorted students from the facility. Based on foot traffic during that first event, we concluded our second event at 2:00 a.m., keeping facilitators more lucid to the event end point. This also made locating volunteers for the later shifts somewhat easier. Library staff and writing center tutors are recruited for the event on a voluntary basis, but the latest shifts are inevitably handled by the writing center and library directors and students who are self-described “night owls.”

Conscription of additional Long Night staff has also been accomplished through the recruitment of faculty volunteers. Students indicated in our first surveys that having their professors available during the event would be beneficial, information that we used to solicit faculty volunteers. Student-faculty interaction is valued at Waldorf College, so it was a fairly easy sell to the faculty members to enlist their assistance. Faculty members from a variety of

disciplines were made available at scheduled hours across the evening, and students readily availed themselves of access to the professors in the informal atmosphere of the event. Faculty members indicated that they appreciated the chance to answer questions and clarify expectations with the students, and the overall sense is that the students’ work was improved as a result of the added interaction. Observing how students approach their assignments outside the classroom venue was also a pedagogical benefit to our faculty. We hope to continue faculty involvement, as it has proven valuable to students, faculty, and to the library/writing center staff.

Our experience also taught us that marketing the event to not just students, but also to faculty, is necessary for a successful event. The marketing department at the college develops a poster template and supplies high-quality posters and bookmarks prior to each event, streamlining campus-wide promotion. Librarians and writing center staff distribute bookmarks to faculty, encouraging them to pass materials on to any struggling students. Other marketing activities for these events include email campaigns, posting on social media, and a story published in the local newspaper.

Our team organizes stations within the library facility for Long Night events, which are staffed by writing center tutors and librarians. Each station is dedicated to a particular aspect of support, such as citing sources, proofreading, or locating information. Due to the number of students that participate in these events, we have found it necessary to dedicate several areas as quiet space as well. A recent Long Night event offered a station for relaxation, presenting a projection of guided relaxation imagery and dim lighting. Surprisingly, student feedback indicated that this was the most popular station offered during the event.

Perhaps the best advice we could give to a team considering holding a Long Night Against Procrastination event is to make it your own and make it entertaining. Various academic institutions make the event unique in their own way: the University of Puget Sound promotes “public declarations of non-procrastination” (University of Puget Sound), and others offer interruptions for guided office yoga (Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison). At New York University Abu Dhabi, students use a “motivation dartboard” to track progress on their goals throughout the event (Datig and Herkner). In order to make the events at Waldorf College as engaging as possible, students are provided with snacks and the opportunity to enter into hourly giveaways. Drawings for giveaways – gift baskets and

college gear – have had the added advantage of offering an incentive to students to provide feedback through a voluntary, anonymous assessment form.

Assessment

In order to plan future events, students are asked to complete an evaluation of each Long Night event, providing feedback on what they thought worked well and what could be improved. At our fall 2013 Long Night event, 86 completed evaluations were received, creating a relatively comprehensive picture. Entering the event, 68% of the students responding assessed their ability to complete their assignment as “good” or “excellent.” Upon exiting, over 90% reported this level of confidence in their ability to complete their assignment. Perhaps the most satisfying metric was that 100% of students evaluated indicated that they would attend a Long Night event in the future.

As with many student events, most suggestions for improvements centered on the quality and quantity of food provided. The team provided a variety of food, including pizza rolls, Chex mix, popcorn, and baked goods, but was unprepared for the turnout at the second event and fell short. Perhaps the most valuable comment from our 2012 inaugural event was the suggestion to make faculty members available during the event to answer questions about assignment requirements, instigating the involvement of faculty at later events. Many students requested that the event be held each semester, and several optimistic students suggested that this event be held every night.

Future Developments

Assessment data have shaped plans for future events; for example, faculty has been recruited to attend events. We also purchased additional food: the college’s theater department offered the use of their industrial popcorn machine for future events, and the dining service offered the use of pizza ovens. Additional media was created: postcards were provided for students to “write home” and tell their families that they are hard at work. Our team hopes to bolster the number of students following the event on Twitter by tweeting updates throughout the night. Events have generated changes and improvements as our team continues to adapt Long Night events to meet the needs of the student population. While the Long Night events at Waldorf College have been campus-focused, the possibility exists to expand this into something more community-based over time. Colleges and universities in larger areas, with active writing groups, may do well to consider including groups outside of the campus as well.

The International Long Night Against Procrastination events have proven both popular and valuable at academic institutions around the globe. Hosting one of these events provides writing centers with an opportunity to collaborate with libraries or academic achievement centers on campus. These events create an atmosphere of serious work and amiable student camaraderie, attracting a number of first-time visitors to the facility. This annual event provides an opportunity to support and engage students on campus. Join the fight against procrastination!

Works Cited

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