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Faculty Pub Night at the William H. Hannon Library: Highlighting Faculty Works Through Creative Programming

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Highlighting faculty works through creative programming.

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Creative, interdisciplinary partnership and collaboration with university faculty is an essential function of every academic library – whether for course design and integration of information literacy in the curriculum, strategically building the library collections, or designing programming for the community. Over the past six years at the William H. Hannon Library at Loyola Marymount University, a program created to highlight and promote faculty publications and creative works has evolved into a keystone of our annual programming line-up. The series, called *Faculty Pub Night*, provides LMU faculty with the opportunity to share their work with students, university staff, other faculty members, and members of the broader community in an informal, collegial setting outside of the classroom, and outside of their academic units. Faculty Pub Night was originally designed to highlight new faculty publications - focusing primarily on monographs. But as the program's popularity spread and more faculty across campus gained awareness and interest in the series, we responded to the request to expand the scope to include creative works, projects, and research in the sciences where publication in monographs is less likely.

Each Faculty Pub Night has the potential to educate about the research and publication or creative process, build collegial and interdisciplinary relationships across campus, showcase our faculty research and creative work to the community, and expand the boundaries of traditional academic programming in the library. In this article, the authors will share the development and evolution of the series, discuss promotion and assessment, identify challenges and successes, and hopefully inspire readers to consider how a program celebrating faculty research and creative works might fit within their own institutions.

Building a Building... and a Series

In August 2009, Loyola Marymount University celebrated the grand opening of the William H. Hannon Library. Our new modern facility was centrally located on campus, with a third-floor event space overlooking the city of Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean. With this new space came the opportunity to imagine how to connect our community with the library through programming in ways that we had not done

in the old building. Our fledgling programming committee proposed a pilot series called Faculty Pub Night, where we would invite faculty to talk about their work and offer attendees a small selection of pub-style snacks and refreshments. (Did you catch the play on words? If not, you're not alone. Further in the article we will discuss some of the challenges we've had with branding the series.)

In Fall 2009 we launched our inaugural Faculty Pub Night series on a shoestring budget, with a lineup of seven speakers throughout the academic year, and a plan for tasty but minimal refreshments. One librarian was responsible for coordinating with the speaker, promoting the program, room set-up and technology support, and coordinating every aspect of the catering, which at that time included a home-made cheeseball and crackers, pitchers of water, and a small ice-bucket with mini-bottles of beer for those over 21 to enjoy. Our speakers were recruited through informal librarian-faculty relationships, and we promoted the series through flyers and word-of-mouth networks. Attendance ranged from a high of 50 to an embarrassing low of 3, with an average of 20.

Building an Audience

Over the course of the program's first year, we identified a direct correlation between the number of attendees at any given program and the level of engagement that the faculty speaker had with promoting the program to their colleagues and students. Pub Nights where extra credit was offered to students who attended - whether from the speaker's class or another professor on campus - always had (and continue to have) higher attendance than those who do not. The 2009 program with only three attendees had zero engagement on the part of the speaker aside from showing up the evening of the event. But as we gained traction and developed more experience with collaborating with faculty for the series, we also hired a dedicated Outreach & Communications Librarian who was able to put the time and energy needed into developing a more sophisticated promotion plan.

Faculty Pub Night poses a particular challenge for building a consistent audience across the series because there are few common threads between each talk. Each evening's subject matter varies widely from month-to-month: one month we learn about studying the teeth of extinct carnivores, the next we feature a poetry slam about Watts Towers, and in another our speaker takes us through the history of black superheroes in American pop culture.

Today, our promotion and outreach for Faculty Pub Night includes:

- Direct communication with the speakers about their role as partner in promoting the program

- Personal invitations to the department chairs of each speaker

- Working across campus to identify partners beyond the academic department of the speaker and the library (expands reach, and in some cases, shares costs)

- Postcards, posters and flyers for the series

- Digital signage in the library building and in select locations on campus

- Web banners on the library home page

- Campus intranet announcements

- Social media

- Identifying specific classes or student groups for which each event might be particularly relevant and sending custom invitations

- Inclusion in the university-wide events calendar and outreach through university communications to get the programs posted in local area newspaper and event calendars

- Targeted outreach to outside groups who may have a special interest in the subject matter

Six years in, attendance at each program averages at a comfortable 45, with one or two each year maxing out capacity in the room. Each audience usually has a dozen regulars (including individuals from both campus and the surrounding community). The make-up of the remainder of the audience varies depending on partnerships and word-of-mouth outreach.

Since 2009 we have broadly expanded our strategy to promote Pub Night and have more than doubled our average annual attendance. But our ongoing assessment of each program (see below) continues to verify what we learned that first year: faculty-speaker partnership and word-of-mouth promotion through personal and professional networks is the most significant factor in building a diverse audience for each talk.

More than a Lecture

The benefit of faculty-speaker partnership in the series goes beyond just getting people in the door. Hannon Library provides the space, much of the promotion, and

the event coordination and catering (which has evolved since 2009 to include a bartender to serve beer and wine and non-alcoholic beverages, and light appetizers from university catering). But the faculty speaker is the main event; the engagement of the audience with the subject matter depends entirely on the appeal of the subject and the public speaking skills of the faculty member. (Thankfully, our faculty - especially those who seek out the opportunity to speak at Pub Night - are much like many at universities everywhere: articulate, entertaining speakers who thrive in front of an audience!)

Each speaker is provided with just under an hour to present their work in a format which best suits their individual presentation style and their subject matter, after which we open up the discussion for Q&A with the audience. After the "official" time for the Q&A is over, we invite the audience to stay, enjoy refreshments, and mingle to continue the conversation. We partner with the campus bookstore to sell books for our faculty speakers with published monographs, and the author will also sign books. For the presentation, most faculty stick with the tried-and-true option of speaking from behind a podium with visuals in PowerPoint on the screen behind them - and the majority of these presentations are excellent and engaging. But some of the most memorable and lively Pub Nights across the life of the series to date have involved a willingness from faculty to creatively consider how they might further personalize the program. It should be noted that, although performance-based disciplines (dance, playwriting or theatre, film and television, poetry) might more naturally lend themselves towards a more creative program approach, the following examples demonstrate how faculty in other disciplines accepted the invitation to customize their presentation:

- A professor of art history curated a local show and published an exhibition catalog about the San Fernando Valley art scene during the mid-to-late 20th century. Around the same time, a close friend of his (unaffiliated with the university) published a critically regarded novel that took place in "The Valley," and the art history professor approached me with the idea of his event as a dialogue between the two of them. The program - which could have easily been presented as a straightforward lecture, ended up being a lively, personal conversation between two talented scholars and writers about art and society, the research and writing process, and how their professions and research and creative processes align and differ, all through the touching and entertaining lens of decades-long friendship.
- The timing for one of our speakers coincided with his family preparing to launch a new study-abroad program in Argentina. The Pub Night was the last of Spring semester, and the theological studies professor and his wife (also on the faculty

at LMU) took the opportunity to use the program not only as a celebration of scholarship and publication, but as a going-away party. They invited friends and family in addition to students and supplemented the catering with homemade food and favorite Argentinian wines. The audience was treated to a thought-provoking academic lecture and left with a feeling that they were a part of a community send-off for this LMU family.

- A journalism professor published a biography of the all-girls punk band The Runaways. We approached our campus independent radio station KXLU (an award-winning station with a long history and cult status in the city) to see if they had interest in partnering on her Pub Night, and an unforgettable program resulted. We brought in a KXLU DJ (and LMU alumna) to interview the professor from our library's event space, and the conversation was broadcast live on the radio station. After the program, the crowd of nearly 100 adjourned to an outdoor plaza on the bluff overlooking the city. While the professor signed books, we were treated to a sunset concert by the all-girls contemporary punk band Upset.

Each of these programs left the participants and the audience talking about the subject matter long after the official presentation was over, and helped us demonstrate to our community how the library can be used as a venue for academic conversations both expected *and* unexpected.

Assessment

Determining the value of programming to our community is not a problem unique to the William H. Hannon Library. As the Faculty Pub Night series has grown over the past six years, so has our ability to assess the value of the program and the impact it has on our students, staff, and faculty. In the initial two years, we counted the number of attendees, but beginning in 2011 we introduced feedback forms asking about demographics, how attendees heard about the event, the likelihood of their attending similar events in the future, and space for additional comments. When in 2012 the library began using LibCal to collect online RSVPs, this process become far more streamlined (although, as we quickly discovered, more than half of our attendees do not RSVP in advance). In 2013, we began offering attendees who filled out a feedback form the chance to be entered into a raffle for a $100 Amazon gift card. Not surprisingly, the percentage of attendees completing the forms at each event rose from around 30% to over 70%.

What have we learned from this feedback? Overall, the feedback from both attendees and speakers is positive. The majority of audience respondents indicate

that they would like to see more events like this one and that they would attend similar events in the future. The few comments that offer recommended changes or criticism usually fall into two categories: (1) "more marketing" and (2) "more food" (though, we rarely run out of food). The character of the event, the format, and the various subject matter is strong enough, it would seem, to produce a consistent level of satisfaction among the majority of attendees.

In 2014, we added an additional level of assessment and introduced a speaker/partner feedback survey that was sent to each speaker after the program as part of the standard "Thank You" email. This survey asked speakers to tell us why they decided to participate in the program and to rate their experience working with library staff. The majority of respondents indicated that they agreed to be a speaker because they wanted to share their work with a broader audience, but over half also indicated that they did so because a friend or colleague asked them to do it.

In response to both attendee and participant feedback, we have strategically expanded and diversified our promotional efforts. Although this still remains a challenge for Pub Night and indeed all of our other library programming (if we had a dollar for every time someone said "you should promote this more," we would not need a fundraising program!). Additionally, we have improved the alignment between initial RSVP numbers and catering and room set-up. We are fortunate to have a flexible event space that can be comfortable for 20 or 80. If we anticipate a smaller turnout, we set out less chairs, which means less empty seats in front of the speaker. An intimate event with 20 engaged attendees can be just as "successful" and meaningful for the speaker as one with a packed house. Although we still get many attendees who do not RSVP in advance, these usually involve students who are attending with a class, and more often than not the faculty member assigning attendance at the program gives us a heads up. Most notably, feedback from attendees about the lack of adequate lighting enabled us to successfully request and receive additional funding to improve lighting in the event space.

Challenges

With nearly six years under our belt, Faculty Pub Night is firmly in the "establishment" of programming not only in the library, but on campus. We have a deep pool of faculty who are interested in speaking, and a much better understanding than when we first started of how to develop partnerships and build a diverse and engaged audience for each program. Yet a few challenges remain:

- Marketing. The challenge of marketing anything with the word "faculty" in the title is how to attract students who might not give a promotional poster a second glance. The series has built up such a strong cache over the past years among the faculty that changing the name risks losing the attention of the speakers necessary to make this event happen. Conversely, we are constantly told by students, "I didn't realize students could go to that." Not only does the word "faculty" throw them off, but the word "pub" seems to suggest a "21 or over" event. We're too clever for our own good, it would seem.

- Expectations. Does what we want out of the program align with what the faculty want? The speaker feedback forms tell us that the majority of our speakers simply want a broader audience with which to share their work (and thus far no one has yet selected the "It will look good on my CV and/or application for rank and tenure" option on our survey). However, it is not uncommon for faculty to contact us four to five months before the call for submissions goes out to "get in line" to be a speaker in the series. This suggests to us that the program may have developed a level of significance far beyond our initial expectations.

- Funding. We are fortunate to have a programming budget deep enough to support the catering and promotional costs of each event (approximately $500). We could certainly cut costs, and any library seeking to replicate a program like this could spend much less on catering, particularly by eliminating alcohol from the event. But identifying a donor who would be willing to sponsor or underwrite the series would guarantee a sustainable future for the Pub Night program here at LMU.

- Scheduling. Although this is not unique to Pub Night, we recognize that by picking a consistent day of the week and time for the series in order to establish a regular schedule, we may be restricting the opportunity for faculty and students who have class at that time to attend.

- "Playing favorites." For the first two years of the program, we recruited faculty speakers on a personal, ad-hoc basis, approaching faculty who we knew had recently published a book and filling out the series that way. As popularity spread, faculty who wished to be a part of the series began approaching us. For the next couple of years we were more or less able to get everyone on the line-up who asked. But in 2014 we finally hit a critical mass of having more faculty interest than we could reasonably accommodate, and to avoid backlash we recognized the need to develop an objective call-for-applications and establish clear criteria for how the library selects the line-up for each year. We are now in our second year of using the open call for applications, which has increased faculty interest in Pub Night, but also allows us to be transparent about the selection process. We emphasize the need to represent a diverse array of faculty throughout the series, including rank, gender, culture, discipline, which has

reduced any concern that we might have had in the past of "just selecting our friends."

The Future

So where do we go from here? We could continue to run Faculty Pub Night as we currently do for the next five years and without a doubt it would continue to draw a similar number of students and faculty each time. The variety of speakers and the novelty of each topic (as it relates to recent publications or creative work) guarantee that the subject matter of each event will be timely and fresh. At the risk of succumbing to mission creep, we are constantly looking for ways to "do more." Should we increase the number of speakers? Should we find a way to include graduate or undergraduate students? Should we explore new event locations or experiment with streaming the event?

We may explore the option of identifying permanent co-sponsorship. As the event is an easy way to highlight the recent research of LMU faculty to the broader scholarly community, additional partners would make it possible to acquire the support needed to expand the program to include more departments, more faculty, greater marketing reach, and higher attendance. Again, this returns to the question of determining what the campus community expects of the Faculty Pub Night series and whether that can align with the goals of the library.

In the coming year, we will try to address some of the challenges outlined above head on, especially those related to marketing and funding. Additionally, we are laying the groundwork for preserving and archiving these talks in our institutional repository. But more importantly, we are exploring new ways to demonstrate the value of this program to students. How does attending a Faculty Pub Night change the student's perception of faculty or academic work? What influence does it have on their understanding of not only the subject material but the scholarly communication process as well? How does it change the student's relationship to the academic library? Now that this series is firmly set into the culture (and calendar!) of the campus community, can we step beyond satisfaction levels (which have reached a consistent level) and successfully identity a link between attendance at library events and student engagement? Therein lies the Holy Grail for any programming librarian.

About the Authors

Jamie Hazlitt is the Librarian for Collection Development and Evaluation for the William H. Hannon Library, or The Librarian Formerly Known as the Outreach and Communications Librarian. She inherited the series from her colleague Marie Kennedy, the original Faculty Pub Night coordinator and creator of the now-legendary cheeseball.

John M. Jackson is the Outreach and Communications Librarian for the William H. Hannon Library at Loyola Marymount University. He is also fondly referred to as "the new Jamie."

For more information about Faculty Pub Night, please visit http://libguides.lmu.edu/pubnight, or contact Programming Librarian Ray Andrade, the current coordinator of the series.