Creating something from nothing: Developing a research poster design workshop to support undergraduate researchers

By: **Scottie Kapel**

Abstract

Undergraduate research (UR) is highly valued at Western Carolina University (WCU). WCU supports several UR programs and funding opportunities, and the university consistently ranks in the top 10 for number of students presenting at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. At both on- and off-campus symposia and conferences, the poster is one of the main forms of disseminating undergraduate research. Despite the prevalence of this format, formal poster design instruction has not been traditionally offered to WCU's undergraduate researchers via library instruction.

This poster details the research poster design workshop that WCU's Outreach & Scholarly Communication (O&SC) Librarian created in 2017 to fill this gap. The workshop is designed to meet the needs of all students regardless of discipline, to provide guidance in research poster design best practices, and to engage the students in their role and responsibility as research product creators. This poster describes the workshop in its current iteration, its evolution over the past two years, ways the O&SC Librarian generated student and colleague interest, and other opportunities that have arisen as a result of partnerships and enthusiasm generated by the workshop.

Creating something from nothing: Developing a research poster design workshop to support undergraduate researchers

Scottie Kapel, Scholarly Communication Librarian
Western Carolina University

Correspondence: skapel@wcu.edu

Problem

Undergraduate research (UR) is highly valued at Western Carolina University (WCU). At UR conferences and symposia, the poster is one of the main forms of disseminating research. Despite the prevalence of this format, formal poster design instruction was not offered to WCU's UR students.
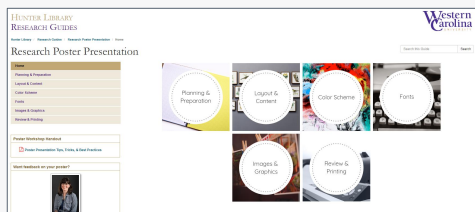
Solution

Design a library-hosted, librarian-led workshop focusing on research poster design best practices and presentation.
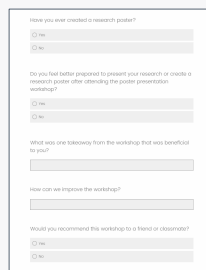
Steps

Identify campus stakeholders and events

Plan workshop and create support materials

Host workshop, assess, reflect, and rework

Structuring the Workshop

Supplies needed
- Sample research posters
- Computer, projector, and display
- Large sheets of blank paper (Post-it easel pads work well)
- Markers and/or colored pencils

Plan
- Effective/Ineffective exercise
  - 5 minutes to identify 2 effective/2 ineffective elements on several sample posters
- Best practices in poster design
  - Use elements noted by students in opening exercise to guide conversation
  - Pre-design considerations
  - Layout, content, and resources
- Storyboard exercise
  - Distribute blank paper and markers/colored pencils to students
  - 10 minutes to start laying out poster, focusing on where and how elements will be placed rather than on content itself
- Finalizing and presenting the poster
  - What to ask of proofreaders
  - The research story in two minutes
  - Practice, practice, practice
- Archiving work in institutional repository
- Workshop assessment survey

Expanding the Initiative

Determine how and where you want to grow

Talk to people in your institution

Let word of mouth work for you

Keep an eye on trends in your own institution and in the larger conversation

Creating Opportunities

- Designing tailored workshops for individual classes
- Leading workshops for other types of research products
- Co-facilitating faculty professional development workshop on incorporating nontraditional research assignments
- Showcasing UR student work in the institutional repository