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Team Teaching, Humor, and Informal Polling Techniques in NECDMC - Based Research Data Management Workshops at Brandeis University

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Team Teaching, Humor, and Informal Polling Techniques in NECDMC - Based Research Data Management Workshops at Brandeis University



Melanie Radik, Gina Bastone, Raphael Fennimore, and Brian Haungs

Before

Organizing Your Working Data
Find It Faster and Remember What It Meant



Storage, Back-up & Security
Where to Put It and How to Protect It



Legal and Ethical Considerations
There May Be a Law About That



Sharing and Preserving
The Future of Your Data



Introduction

Spring semester 2015, Brandeis Library & Technology Services Research and Instruction unit launched research data management workshops based on the NECDMC curriculum. The workshop lesson plan was very structured and closely modeled the NECDMC modules. The one-hour workshop was expected to consist of three sections:

- Co-presented material in uninterrupted lecture format
- Brief Q&A period
- NECDMC module's hands-on exercises

In no workshop did we get to the hands-on exercise. This was due to the attendee's confusion over lecture material and their questions on topics outside the scope of the workshop. We determined our descriptions of the workshops didn't best convey the topics covered, and our emphasis on theory and best practices left listeners confused as to how the information applied to their own research.

However, we felt that these discussions with attendees highlighted areas we could improve for the Fall semester's iteration of the workshops. We conducted research into pedagogical techniques that would complement the material and mix of attendees. We came to the conclusion that three techniques could be incorporated to improve student engagement and material comprehension, and these techniques would complement a shift in focus from theory and best practices to best practices and Brandeis-specific solutions.

Team Teaching

One pedagogical technique we pursued was inviting instructors from another discipline to team teach the workshops with us. We partnered with colleagues from the Technology Help Desk and Desktop Support sections from IT: The Desktop Systems Specialist from the Hardware Repair Shop and the Help Desk Intern. Their strengths in the areas of storage, backup, and security solutions were especially relevant.

Collaborating on slide and lecture design alone provided valuable insights into the different approaches to research data management services. We were able to add depth of technical detail, whereas in earlier workshops the best we were able to provide was advice on further reading.

Our colleagues from IT expressed similar interest in the librarian approach and felt themselves better prepared to field data management questions that range beyond traditional IT areas.

Informal Polling

Extremely informal – no clickers or apps, just several deliberately phrased yes or no questions placed throughout the workshop.

We encouraged attendees who indicated they had personal experience with the topic to share their stories. We instructors had our own anecdotes to share, with the IT professionals contributing a wealth of user stories from adventures in desktop support and hardware repair. Did you know it's possible to acquire internal water damage to your laptop's hard drive in high enough humidity?

This deliberately interactive style resulted in visibly captivated attendees who had questions relevant to the material, actively shared anecdotes, paid attention to the screen, and demonstrate engaged body language.

Works Consulted

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Humor

Humor as a pedagogical tool is a tricky business, as it is quite possible to do more harm than good. Between the subjective nature of humor, the fleeting duration of pop culture references, and the jargon-like qualities of subject-specific humor, using humor to enhance student learning is difficult.

After consulting the literature, we decided to employ a mix of humorous anecdotes about data management disasters (with the user in question thoroughly anonymized), and cartoon-like icons when possible and appropriate within the slides themselves. Comics from the webcomic XKCD were also sparingly employed, after determining that even without prior familiarity, the message conveyed about the data management errors was clear and amusing.

Reactions and commentary from attendees were uniformly positive, with the comics and humorous anecdotes in particular encouraging attendees to share similar personal experiences of themselves or friends.

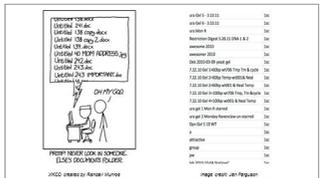
Conclusions

While we did not have a large enough sample size to perform rigorous evaluation of learning outcomes, we can state that student engagement during the workshops was noticeably greater, their questions were more on topic, and showed true understanding of the material and its relevance to their personal research.

We even have evidence of attendees applying this knowledge. One attendee, who from comments and questions made it clear had never performed a backup of his main laptop, was astonished to learn that Brandeis sells heavy-duty desktop external drives equipped with Rebit, a third-party backup software. He approached the correct service point later that day to acquire one. This attendee found himself in our workshop completely by mistake – he indicated on our workshop sign-in form that he intended to attend a workshop on Stata, running concurrently in a different classroom. We count this as all kinds of success.

After

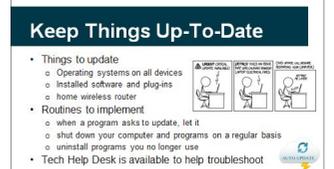
How *Not* to Lose Track of Your Research
Organization and Planning Resources at Brandeis



How *Not* to Lose the Only Copy of Your Research
Storage and Backup Tools at Brandeis



How *Not* to Have Your Research Stolen or Corrupted
Security Best Practices and Resources at Brandeis



How *Not* to Be the Only One Who Knows About Your Research
Sharing and Archiving for Posterity

