

Eliminate the Negative: Moving from Embarrassed to Prepared

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Eliminate the Negative: Moving from Embarrassed to Prepared

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Who We Are

Mercer University enrolls more than 8,300 students in 11 colleges and schools spanning undergraduate liberal arts to doctorate-level degrees on campuses in Macon, Atlanta, and Savannah and at Regional Academic Centers across the state of Georgia. The College of Liberal Arts (CLA), the oldest academic unit, remains the cornerstone of the educational programs and is on the Macon campus that has served as Mercer's home since 1871. One of Mercer's core values states "as a community committed to intellectual and religious freedom, we seek to enrich the mind and spirit by promoting and facilitating an open and rigorous search for truth, including an examination of the great moral, religious, and ethical questions of this and every age" (Mercer, 2012). One way of promoting and facilitating this inquiry is inviting national and international scholars to campus to lecture and interact with students.

A Mercer distinctive is the interdisciplinary nature of inquiry that promotes the collaboration across schools and colleges. The newest collaborative effort is the Integrative Program (INT) that debuted in fall 2012 with a focus on interdisciplinary courses requiring students to read texts across disciplines and learn to write complete and polished texts for a variety of audiences and purposes.

The Jack Tarver Library (Tarver Library) is a medium-sized academic library with 11 faculty and 15 staff who serve and support primarily undergraduates through CLA and the Macon programs of the Stetson School of Business and Economics, the Tift College of Education, the School of Engineering, the Townsend School of Music, and the College of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Why We Do This

"Learning Happens Here" is a motto lived out by Tarver Library faculty and staff. An annual award recognizes excellence in undergraduate research projects that incorporate the use of library collections and services and demonstrate exceptional information literacy skills on the part of the undergraduate researcher. Nine Subject Librarians serve as the "face" of the library by providing information, guidance, and training in using the library's resources and services. The library is a central gathering place where people come to learn and socialize. Library faculty and staff are involved in a wide range of campus activities.

Supporting campus life comes naturally, whether it is providing collections, space, or services for faculty and students. Actively supporting campus lecture series and the new INT program and honoring regional collecting emphases are visible ways of demonstrating the learning that happens at Tarver Library. This project provides an opportunity for students to review an author's work before attending a lecture or learning more about a scholar who will be on campus for a day, a week, or even a semester.

What We Chose

CLA sponsors three major lecture series each year:

- Lamar Lecture Series (fall)—promotes the permanent preservation of Southern culture, history, and literature; one lecturer provides three lectures;
- Ferrol Sams Lectures (spring)—brings a nationally prominent fiction writer, poet, or dramatist to serve as the Ferrol A. Sams, Jr. Distinguished Chair of English, teach creative writing, and provide lectures and/or reading of their works that highlight the literary arts; and

- Harry Vaughan Smith Lectures (spring)—features an outstanding theology scholar who serves as the Distinguished Visiting Professor of Christianity; one lecturer provides three lectures.

Faced with an extensive listing of literary awards, the author chose to focus on Georgia literary prizes and awards. This selection fulfilled the needs to honor regional collecting emphases, provided potential sources for the writing courses required in the second semester of the first year of INT, and honored a donor whose collection is available in the Tarver Library.

- Townsend Prize for Fiction—awarded every other year (since 1981) to an outstanding novel or short-story collection published by a Georgia writer during the past 2 years; named for Jim Townsend, founding editor of *Atlanta Magazine* and early mentor to Atlanta writers including Pat Conroy, Terry Kay, William Diehl, and Anne Rivers Siddons;
- Lillian Smith Award—awarded annually to authors whose books are outstanding creative achievements that demonstrate through literary merit and moral vision an honest representation of the South, its people, its problems, and its promises; and
- Tom Watson Brown Book Prize—presented annually for the outstanding book on the causes, conduct, and effects, broadly defined, of the Civil War.

How We Make This Happen

The author identified three steps to make this project a reality. Ironically, the trigger for creating the project, the calendar, was actually the easiest part. Identifying and then collecting the information needed to populate the calendar was more difficult and took several weeks to complete.

First, the author created documentation for each identified lecture series or literary award that incorporated basic details, including links to references, calendar of dates for known events, and collecting levels. This documentation is on the libraries' Intranet to make it available to all library employees. Examples of the documentation, not including personal contact information, for the Lamar Lecture Series and Townsend Prize are included at the end of this paper.

Second and closely tied to the first step, the author established or confirmed connections with key people involved with each event or award and incorporated these into the documentation for future reference. Part of this process led to the identification of a next step to compile documentation, especially for campus lecture series, into one source rather than requiring the examination of several archival folders.

Third, the author created a Google Calendar (Aware). A Google Calendar offered several advantages, including availability at no cost; the familiar interface, since Google calendars are in use across the campus and heavily used within Tarver Library; options for pop-up and/or e-mail reminders offered minutes, hours, days, or weeks in advance; and the ability to search the calendar for specific events or activities. Known dates for each of the identified lectures and literary prizes covering 2012 to 2015 were entered. A combination of pop-up and e-mail reminders notifies the author of actual events as well as activities associated with the planning process. Planning activities may include anticipated dates for press releases or college committees' announcements of next year's lectures as well as timelines for ordering library materials or requesting a colleague's assistance with creating a display. A screenshot of the Aware Google Calendar displaying search results for HVS (Harry Vaughan Smith Lecture Series) and associated planning activities is included in Figure 1.

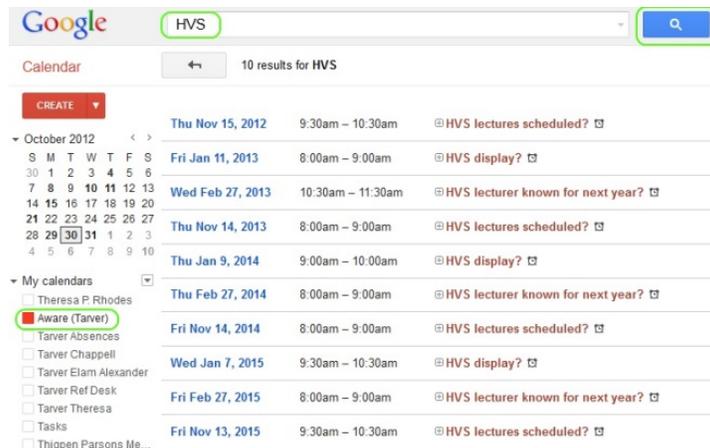


Figure 1. HVS Search Results on Aware Google Calendar

Who Makes This Happen

Collections work is all about connections. Throughout this project, the author affirmed connections within the library and made new connections across the campus and the state. Connections within the library included the Outreach & Assessment Librarian who is traditionally responsible for creating physical and/or virtual displays related to campus events. Archives staff provided essential connections regarding both the history of campus events and the names of planners and participants. They also provided referrals to colleagues at other institutions. For example, the Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia currently manages the Lillian Smith Award. Campus administrative assistants are critical participants in the success of the project. While a key faculty member may leave the institution or complete a committee rotation, these administrative assistants remain and keep great records.

While people are critical to the success of the project, tying the events to a shared calendar is a key component. Previous strategies, including depending on press releases or “institutional memory” did not work for us. Placing items on a shared calendar minimized gaps or omissions and provided the opportunity to be prepared when a lecturer spoke, a donor visited, a literary prize was announced, or a writing assignment was made.

How We Have Fared

The goal is to support CLA’s three major lecture series and the INT program by purchasing books written by visiting lecturers and award-winning titles often required by writing assignments and to recognize donor Tom Watson Brown by collecting the books receiving the prize named in his honor. Associated activities often include providing print or virtual displays of available materials by visiting lecturers. The results to date indicate that we are meeting our goals and are indeed appearing prepared rather than embarrassed. The President of the Watson-Brown Foundation visited the campus in the fall of 2012 and toured the gift collection that is still in process. As a part of the tour, the author mentioned plans for a display in honor of the donor that would include highlighting the Tom Watson Brown Book Prize winning titles. Likewise, the author relaxed and enjoyed this year’s lectures in the Lamar Lecture Series, since previous connections with the committee supplied the name of the visiting lecturer in advance—allowing for the purchase and physical display of significant works available before his visit. It is important to note that simply receiving an alert from the Aware Google Calendar is not enough. For example, there are no published dates for the 2014 Townsend Prize for Fiction. Based on previous years’ activities, a reminder was set for the first week in April. Receiving a Google alert is a reminder to search the website and/or the news to check the status. Especially with events not tied to a specific date,

the alert is simply the first step toward preparation versus embarrassment.

Other Applications

Mercer's Southern Studies department recently awarded the inaugural Sidney Lanier Prize for Southern Literature that honors significant career contributions to Southern writing in drama, fiction, or poetry. This has a link to both the academic program at Mercer as well as to the city of Macon, the birthplace of the nineteenth-century Southern poet and musician. The First Annual Africana Studies Lecture series was held last month, featuring the Honorable Amina Salum Ali, African Union Ambassador to the United States. Mercer also sponsors other lecture series not limited to the Macon campus or even to Mercer, including the D. Perry and Betty Ginn Lecture Series on Christian Faith and Modern Science and the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. Now that the process is established, adding new prizes or lecture series should be straightforward.

References

Mercer University. (n.d.). About Mercer. Retrieved from www.mercer.edu/about.mercer.edu/values

Sample Documentation

Lamar Lectures

Basic Details:

- <http://www2.mercer.edu/NewCLA/LecturesAndSeminars/lamar.htm>
- <http://www.mercer.edu/SST/Lamar.html>
- made possible by the bequest of the late Eugenia Dorothy Blount Lamar who died in 1955 and was a well-known civic and organizational leader in Macon and the South
- donor's will stipulated that Mercer will annually sponsor lectures designed to help preserve the cultural, historical, and literary culture of the South and that lectures will be "... of the very highest type of scholarship"
- trust further stipulated that the lectures "... deal with Southern history and culture, be focused on the constitutional history of the pre-Civil War and Confederate South"
- Mercer appointed a statewide committee to assist in the selection of speakers and publishing of the addresses (currently by the University of Georgia Press)
- official title: Eugenia Dorothy Blount Lamar Memorial Lectureship
- began in 1957 (November 21)
- recognized as "the most important lecture series on Southern history and literature in the United States"
- traditionally scheduled in October with one lecturer presenting three lectures

The author has used the documentation and calendar for several national/international awards, including the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize in Letters, and the Nobel Prize in Literature. Although these do not have the associated connection with campus events, assignments, or regional collection emphases, this codification also eliminates embarrassment—when awards are announced, displays can quickly be created rather than waiting for titles to arrive.

Next Steps

The author plans to assemble all the documentation for at least the three major CLA lecture series that would detail the history of the series, list all previous speakers, and include library holdings as appropriate. A similar compilation of documentation for the major Georgia literary awards would also include library holdings and a plan for acquiring previous years' titles as indicated by the collecting levels.

Local Contact Information:

- <omitted>

Calendar of Speakers:

- October 2012—Michael Kreyling, Vanderbilt, English
- October 2013—Dan Usner, Vanderbilt, History
- October 2014—William Andrews, University of North Carolina, English
- October 2015—Patricia Sullivan, University of South Carolina, History

Collecting Levels:

- significant titles for all lecturers
 - caveat that University Press titles come automatically through approval plan
- entire body of work for lecturer if supported by curriculum or regional emphasis

Townsend Prize for Fiction

Basic Details:

- <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2568>
- <http://thechattahoocheereview.gpc.edu/prizes.htm>
- <http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Awards/>
- considered to be Georgia's "oldest and most prestigious" literary award
- founded in 1980 in honor of Jim Townsend, founding editor of *Atlanta Magazine* and early mentor to Pat Conroy, Terry Kay, William Diehl, and Anne Rivers Siddons
- presented biennially
- nominees selected by *The Chattahoochee Review*
- anonymous independent panel of judges selects the winner
- sponsorship changed often and current custodian is *The Chattahoochee Review*

Book Details:

- author must be a Georgia writer
- must be a book-length work of fiction or collection of short stories published in the previous two years
- judges look for excellence and originality in language and human insight

Calendar:

- usually announced in April and awarded in May
- finalists for the prize announced about six weeks after submissions evaluated
- award announced about two months after the finalists' announcement
- no published calendar dates available for book submissions for the 2014 prize
 - according to Literary Events Editor for *The Chattahoochee Review*, publishers are encouraged to send nominated works by December 1, 2013, for judges' consideration
 - added to announcements e-mail list for guest author series of readings, panels, and author appearances by the 2012 winner and finalists of the Townsend Prize

Collecting Levels:

- nominated titles for all winners and finalists
- entire body of work for winner if supported by curriculum or regional emphasis