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# Colloquium Series: A Study in Library Faculty Engagement

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the implementation of a Colloquium Series intended to connect library faculty and staff through research projects, presentations, and proposals. The Series aims to foster collaboration among library faculty and staff as well as support the library's strategic goals for encouraging research, academic engagement and learning in a semi-formal setting.

**Keywords:** Strategic engagement Academic librarians Library outreach strategies Lecture series

## Introduction

In the fall of 2015, librarians at the Stony Brook University Libraries introduced a new lecture series that would enable the 25+ faculty librarians and 100+ library staff to learn about each other's projects in a semi-formal setting. Coming on the heels of the newly formed library strategic plan, the Colloquium Series' mission is to support the scholarly and research goals of its faculty and staff by fostering collaborations, supporting learning and assessment, and bringing together the large body of library faculty and staff through a series of lectures.

## Literature review

In order to construct a framework in which to present the case study of our Colloquium Series, a review of the literature was conducted. Various roles have emerged for the academic librarian over the past several years including responsibilities for outreach to the campus community. Collaborating as research partners and developing relationships on campus and with local organizations is an important part of the process. Sharing scholarship and individuals areas of expertise is a concept beneficial to any organization. Academic departments and disciplines often exist in silos; thus knowledge sharing becomes even more important and the library can take a leadership role in this practice.

## *Outreach & Academic Engagement*

The literature supports the concept that all academic libraries should be engaged in some time of outreach initiatives. The method for this outreach however is highly variable depending on the institution. For Reeves, Nishimuta, McMillan, and Godin (2003) they found it important to leave the library and attend campus events in order to connect with

faculty members (p. 63). Northwest Vista College librarians also participated in the college's graduation ceremonies, which helped foster recognition among teaching faculty as well as students (Reeves, et al., 2003, p. 63). For Silver (2014) and her colleagues at the University of Florida, library outreach manifested itself in a program series highlighting the scholarship of the university's faculty (p. 268). In order to draw more attention to the library and its important role in supporting the academic community, the librarians at UF created a program that placed the library directly in the heart of intellectual conversation (Silver, 2014). The Authors@UF series was a chance to directly engage the campus in a semi-formal style. It reinforced the library's role as a center of learning, invited the campus community to explore scholarship outside of their traditional roles (student, professor, etc.), and enabled librarians to position their role in research and knowledge curation alongside successful works (Silver, 2014).

### ***Fostering Collaborations***

A key component of academic engagement is considered to be relationship management. Leiligdon, Quinn and Briggs (2015) make comparisons between the type of activities libraries must engage in to stay relevant within the institution and Customer Relationship Management. They suggest that the systematic approach to building relationships over long periods of time is imperative to the success of libraries (p. 250). We want to cultivate partners rather than patrons. Relationship marketing is a concept that ties into academic engagement as well. As the role of libraries change and evolve within the academic landscape, we want to remain relevant and demonstrate an understanding of the overall strategies and goals of the larger university mission. The University of Nottingham underwent a significant change to prioritize strategic engagement and relationship management in their daily activities. This shift was intentionally targeted toward key university stakeholders to help them understand the library was moving away from a traditional service provider role. The goal was to view the library faculty as their library peers and colleagues and the library institution as a trusted partner for academic endeavors (Eldgride, Fraser, Simmonds & Smyth, 2016, p. 163).

The following case study of a Colloquium Series launched by Stony Brook University Libraries in the fall of 2015 reflects and builds upon these concepts of outreach, academic engagement and collaborations on campus.

## **Case Study: Colloquium Series**

### ***Statement of Need***

The Colloquium Series was initially launched in the fall of 2015 in support of the library's newly adopted strategic plan. The strategic plan placed an emphasis on the outward facing role of the library and the importance of its role in developing opportunities for scholarship both within the library and with our campus community. The general overview and vision

driving the strategic plan was created to align with the University's mission (Stony Brook University Libraries, 2015),

The University Libraries is an essential partner in Stony Brook University's mission of global leadership in research, discovery, and learning, positioning ourselves as the hub of collaboration, digital innovation and scholarly endeavors. We enable the dissemination, preservation, and creation of new knowledge by remaining committed to delivering world-class physical and digital content and services critical to research, education, and outreach, now and in the future.

We are engaged in scholarly, cultural and artistic interactions with Stony Brook University, its regional and global communities by:

Promoting academic engagement

Building, preserving and providing access to rich and diverse collections

Developing responsive library spaces for diverse user communities

Fostering an innovative culture of learning and assessment (pp. 1–2)

Two of the above mentioned principles in the newly designed strategic plan directly impacted the decision to move forward with the Colloquium Series and garnered support from library administration, including the Dean of Libraries who has been very supportive of the series.

**Principle 1 Promote Academic Engagement:** We are committed to participating in the entire life cycle of the research, teaching and learning process that emphasize critical thinking and innovative forms of expression. We identify priorities that guide strategic efforts to foster academic collaborations and cultivate enduring partnerships to enable student, faculty, and research success (Stony Brook University Libraries, 2015, p. 1).

The Colloquium Series was conceptualized as a way for tenure-track library faculty to introduce themselves and their research interests to the larger campus community in hopes of initiating partnerships with teaching faculty, other library faculty, and even members of the larger community. It was realized fairly early that all library faculty, not only those on the tenure-track, can benefit from collaborative opportunities and promotion of library research. The program allows for another layer of engagement with faculty, students and liaison departments. Often librarians can use their presentations as a reason to send personal invitations to specific faculty members whom they believe may share an interest.

**Principle 4 Foster and Innovative Culture of Learning and Assessment:** We encourage and enable all staff to contribute to the development of the library as a learning organization

that acquires knowledge and responds appropriately to a rapidly changing environment. Learning organizations (a) create a culture that encourages and supports continuous employee learning, critical thinking, assessment, and risk taking and innovation of new ideas, (b) allow experimentation, and value employee contributions, (c) learn from experience and experiment, and (d) disseminate the new knowledge throughout the organization for incorporation into day-to-day workflows. (Stony Brook University Libraries, 2015, p. 2).

In addition to supporting the guiding principles, the Colloquium Series also lends itself to professional development opportunities for librarians. The research presented sometimes directly relates to the work of another faculty librarian. Research interests that might not directly relate to our liaison areas would not be immediately apparent and therefore it could be difficult to identify collaborative partners. This forum connects librarians and faculty to each other's scholarship in a way that had not previously been available.

Additionally the Series has become an opportunity for student employees to be connected with the work librarians engage in. Students have an opportunity to see how professional presentations are conducted and it gives them access to a scholarly forum for discussion and inquiry.

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this series is to provide a mechanism for relationship building and academic engagement led by librarians and highlighting their research interests and initiatives. The intention is to illuminate the research of librarians and foster collaborations between library faculty and teaching faculty in various departments. For many years, librarians have struggled to be perceived as equals amongst research and teaching faculty. The Colloquium Series provides a venue for a librarian's research to be shared with the campus community.

The very first Colloquium session included a presentation for "Health Literacy and Consumer Health Information." The invitation to this session had been broadcast to the entire campus community. One of our attendees was the Senior Manager, Provider and Community Engagement Specialist for the Suffolk Care Collaborative. This collaboration was led by Stony Brook University Hospital which had recently been charged to lead the Medicaid reform initiative to reduce hospital readmissions. The representative attending asked the speaker if she would be interested in sitting on the Cultural Competency and Health Literacy working group. She has been a member of this group for the past year and has assisted in the adoption of consumer health flyers and other materials being used across Suffolk County, NY.

## Launching the Series

### *Program description*

The Colloquium Series is a monthly lecture series featuring faculty and staff members from the University Libraries. The series is an opportunity for librarians and library professionals to share their research, papers, and projects with colleagues and the greater academic community in a semi-formal setting. The Colloquium Series takes place during fall and spring semesters with approximately one event per month. Events are held on the third Thursday of the month at 1pm in the main campus library's Special Collections Seminar Room. Events are one hour in length and comprise at least 2 presentations, with 20 minutes per presentation. Attendees are encouraged to ask questions and provide feedback after each talk. Speakers generally use PowerPoint or Google Slides to augment their presentation and are outfitted with a clip-on microphone and slide clicker. All Colloquiums are filmed and photographed and the videos available on the library's YouTube page.

### *Finding speakers*

Remaining consistent with other professional development opportunities, a call for proposals is sent to the all library faculty and staff internal listserv several weeks prior to the start of the semester. Dates for the series are identified and circulated with the call. We ask that potential speakers identify any dates when they will not be available. The call for proposals usually includes language encouraging library faculty to share their current research projects that may be in progress or presentations from a recent event or conference that they feel would be of interest to the library and campus community. If there are remaining presentation slots available in the schedule, the organizer will reach out to library faculty with specific areas of expertise such as, technology, digital humanities or global initiatives and send a more direct request for a presentation. Library administration has fully supported the Colloquium Series since its inception. The Dean of Libraries was very much involved in the conceptualization of the series including scope and format, she was very aware of the engagement and collaborative projects that could stem from this type of forum. As such, administrators and supervisors encourage their faculty to participate. When librarians return from professional development travel or presentations, they are reminded to share their research as a Colloquium presentation. Often the Dean will identify potential topics or special areas of interest based on campus initiatives, conversations with colleagues or attendance at library events.

### *Location*

The Melville Library's Special Collections Seminar Room has been used to host the events. The lecture room's horseshoe style seating can accommodate approximately 50 people. There is a large screen display in the front of the room with a podium for the speaker. Food and drink are not permitted inside. The room is located on the second floor of the library and not in a high traffic area. This means that potential attendees must know of the

event *beforehand* as there is no real opportunity for stumbling upon the program. This is something that will be discussed in our future planning of the events.

The space highlights our library's artwork, unique collections, and historic university memorabilia. The ephemera in the space often catches the eye of researchers and faculty members who begin inquiring about the collections or discuss the potential significance some of these items may have in their own work. Often the venue itself has been a means to additional collaborations between teaching faculty and the library.

### ***Prep Work & Promotion***

When an event is initially proposed, the event organizer must fill out a form with information such as the description, proposed date, and location of the event. Additionally, organizers are asked to select the type of promotion they would like for their event as well as when that promotion should begin. Organizers are invited to select the following options for promotion and publicity:

1. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
2. Campus Announcements
3. Communications, Happenings, University Webpage, Digital Signage
4. Campus-wide email (requires approval by Associate Deans)
5. All of the above

The Colloquium Series organizer generally selects "All of the above" and asks that promotion begin approximately 2 weeks prior to each lecture.

All library event proposals must be submitted before the new semester begins, ensuring there is enough time to prepare promotional materials and alert various departments on campus. Colloquium Series events are listed on the library's website events page, with presenter descriptions, location, time, and date for each event. A simple registration form (Name, Email Address) is located at the bottom of each event page and all attendees are encouraged to register.

The library's Communications & Outreach Working Group (COWG) is responsible for preparing and disseminating information about all library events. The working group consists of 7 members, comprising library faculty, staff, and two library Associate Deans. COWG relies on a spreadsheet to streamline workflow from event proposal to completion. Once an event is approved, a variety of tasks are assigned to working group members, ranging from reserving an event space to scheduling social media postings.

For the Colloquium Series, each lecture is added to the university-wide campus announcements (a weekly email sent to the campus about upcoming events), promoted on campus-wide and library digital signage (designed by a member of COWG), added to the universi-

ty and library calendars, spotlighted on the library website's banner slideshow (designed by a member of COWG), and promoted on the library's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram feeds. All event graphics are designed at the discretion of the COWG designers. If registration for a lecture is low, the Associate Dean may decide to send a university-wide email spotlighting the lecture and encouraging email recipients to register. Occasionally, the university Twitter will retweet the library's event tweets, increasing the event's promotional reach from 1, 400 followers to 28, 000 followers.

All Colloquium Series presenters are encouraged to send their slides (or a link to their published slides) one or two days prior to the lecture, to ensure there are no formatting issues or other possible problems.

#### ***Day-of Implementation***

The day of the Colloquium Series, a member of the library IT department arrives in the lecture room one hour before the event begins. The IT person sets up the laptop, loads presentations, and ensures the slides are displaying properly. He also sets up the video camera at the back of the room and tests the microphone and audio system.

The lecture room doors open 15 minutes before the presentation begins, enabling attendees to choose their seats and get settled. At 1pm, the event organizer welcomes the attendees and introduces the first presenter with a brief biography. After the first lecture, the organizer invites attendees to ask questions and moderates the time spent on each. The organizer follows the same procedure when introducing the second presenter and allots the same amount of time for questions at the end of the presentation. At the end of the event, the organizer thanks everyone for attending and provides some information about the next Colloquium event.

#### ***Descriptions /Stats***

The library faculty at our institution have diverse and unique research interests. We have tried each semester to ensure that our program reflects that broad spectrum. However, if themes develop, the organizer tries to pair presentations together in the hopes of increasing attendance and participation by devoting the entire hour to an area of interest. For example, one Colloquium featured two presentations relating to New York. *Collecting on the margins: Times Square Adult Lit in the 1970s* highlighting one librarian's collection activities for the New York Public Library. The second presentation for the day was, *The History of the Play Bill* describing when the Play Bill was first introduced and how it has evolved over the years. These two presentations paired together created an audience that was interested in the individual topics but also those interested in regional history.

Other topics over the past few semesters have covered various disciplines. We have presentations in the areas of Science and Technology including; *A Review of Particle Detectors*,



*3D printing in Education*, and *Geoscience updates*. We include topics in medicine and biomedical research; *Health Literacy and Access to Consumer Health Information*, *Chinese Acupuncture: Diagnosis and Treatment*, and *Libraries in Support of Medical Humanities*. In the humanities, *Social Responsibility, Democracy, Education, and Professionalism*, and *Writing Memory: The French Revolution and the 'Archives Nationales' in Contemporary Texts*. Most frequently our presentations do focus on information studies and library sciences; *Open Access & Data Management*, *Reading Libraries: Past Practice and Current Implications*, *Better Together: An examination of Collaborative Publishing between Librarians and STEM and Health Sciences Faculty* and *Travels of a Digital Projects Librarian*. These just reflect a portion of the presentations we've hosted over the two year span of the Colloquium Series however this sample demonstrates the variety, interdisciplinary nature of our research and potential areas for continued scholarship and collaboration.

We have not identified specific trends in terms of attendance and topic selection. We have noticed a slight decrease in attendance since the inception of the Colloquium Series. We attribute the initial peak attendance to the curiosity surrounding a new forum for library research to be displayed. Additionally, the library has significantly increased its involvement in academic engagement and outreach events in more than one way. Competing priorities for time could be a potential factor in the decline. During our initial semester hosting the Colloquium Series, our average audience was 25 people. We still have a steady audience for each event however our current average audience is 15 people.

### ***Preservation and Archiving***

The organizer requests permission from the presenters to retain a copy of their presentation slides. Currently these slides reside in a Google Drive folder shared only among the chair of the Outreach & Communication Working Group and organizers of the event. Photos are taken during the event. Selected photos are shared as part of our outreach and marketing pages on the library webpage while others are saved in a Google Drive folder. The recordings of the presentation are currently kept private and shared only upon request of the presenting faculty member. The presentation files, photos and recordings have become a robust archive of library scholarship. This has been an unintended benefit of series.

### ***Assessment and Future Initiatives***

Overall, the Colloquium Series has been a successful event series in terms of its initial goals. The series has successfully introduced library faculty and staff to the work of their colleagues and has fostered collaborations among them. Feedback from the library faculty and staff has been mostly positive, though attendance has petered over the last year. This may be due to the frequency of scheduling or due to the increasing outreach events and competing priorities throughout the library. COWG has been charged with assessing the

current format of the series and potentially testing new formats to increase attendance. The proposed format changes include lightning talks or less frequent but longer duration events where attendees may come and go throughout the event. Although the Special Collections Seminar Room has been a great venue for sharing our scholarship, we are considering trying another newly renovated but higher traffic area for the presentations in the hopes of having drop-in attendees. We are also considering the creation of a web presence or digital collection associated with the Colloquium Series in order to raise awareness and bring a higher profile to the events. Library faculty can use this as an additional resource to facilitate communication and collaboration with colleagues. As previously outlined, we do have an archive including digital files of presentation slides, photos and video of the event. A proposal will be set forth asking for assistance from the digital projects librarian to work on metadata and hosting site for the collection.

## Conclusion

It is our belief that the Colloquium Series has been a beneficial activity for the library in helping to achieve the goals established in the new strategic plan. The Colloquium Series has proven to be a valuable opportunity for library faculty to share their research in ways that had not previously been possible. We believe that this endeavor will continue in future semesters. As time goes on, the current format or venue of the series may change, however the library's need to communicate the value of our research will not diminish. It is our goal to grow the series, encourage participation, increase attendance, and find innovative ways to share our research, engage with the academic community, and strengthen collaborations among library faculty and deepen our connections with the teaching faculty on campus.

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Jamie Saragossi is the Health Sciences Collection Development and Outreach Librarian at Stony Brook University. Jamie works on various initiatives but has a strong interest in supporting learning, research, and discovery through academic engagement and outreach initiatives. Her research interests include Mobile Apps in academic library collections, embedded librarianship through the use of technology, evidence-based practice instruction and support, and systematic reviews. Jamie holds an MLS from Queens College and a BA in Rhetoric and Communications from SUNY Albany.