FSU-USF Intercollegiate Symposium on Library and Information Science:

An Overview and Future Plans

By

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Introduction

The FSU-USF Intercollegiate Symposium on Library and Information Science was conceived out of the necessity to find collaborative opportunities for the University of South Florida’s American Library Association Student Chapter. USF’s LIS students primarily rely upon student organizations for setting up networking and professional development opportunities. It was, then, speculated that Florida State University’s ALA Student Chapter may be interested in co-sponsoring joint events. As such, USF’s ALA Student Chapter vice president, Adam Berkowitz, contacted FSU’s ALA Student Chapter president, Adriana Williams, in the hopes that she may be open to such a partnership.

It was decided that the co-sponsored event would be a day-long symposium featuring student and faculty presentations. The University of Florida proved to be an ideal venue for the event considering its reputation as a research institution and close proximity to both universities. In coordinating with UF’s Dean of Libraries, Judith Russell, and executive assistant, Misty Colson, the symposium was scheduled to take place at UF’s Marston Science Library on April 19, 2018.

This article will continue to detail the actions taken by Berkowitz and Williams in their attempt to organize this symposium and include what transpired on the day of the event. It will also expand upon the feedback received from attendees and suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, this article will discuss the role that student organizations play in meeting the professional development needs of LIS students, and the need for support from professional associations to ensure that LIS students are sufficiently prepared for their careers.
FSU ALA Student Chapter Preparations

After solidifying a date, Adriana Williams advertised a call for speakers to FSU’s School of Information faculty and students. In an attempt to find more potential speakers and perpetuate the ideals of a truly intercollegiate event, Lorri Mon, the Director of the iSchool, extended this invitation to UF’s library faculty. The presenters who joined the symposium from FSU’s College of Communication and Information included Lorri Mon and Ebrahim Randeree. Plato Smith, an FSU alum and library faculty member at UF, also agreed to present.

After the list of presenters had been finalized, Williams advertised the symposium on the FSU School of Information student listservs, the FSU University Libraries staff newsletter, and the FSU ALA Student Chapter Facebook page. Some iSchool professors also shared information about the symposium with their classes. Williams also set-up a Google Hangouts page where the event would be streamed live which was emphasized in marketing materials for those who would prefer to attend virtually.

Williams then made arrangements with UF affiliated caterers. Panera and Moe’s were chosen to serve breakfast and lunch respectively. After discussing the cost of catering, it was decided that USF would pay for Panera and FSU would pay for Moe’s.

USF ALA Student Chapter Preparations

Meanwhile, Adam Berkowitz contacted USF students and faculty to gauge their interest in presenting at the symposium. Faculty members at both the School of Information and USF Libraries were e-mailed about this opportunity. It was explained that this would be the first-ever student sponsored symposium in the histories of Florida’s LIS programs, and that the purpose of the symposium was to bring together the two LIS programs in the spirit of networking,
collaboration, and research. A group of librarians from USF Libraries – Tampa agreed to present. USF’s presenters included: Matt Torrence and John Abresch, Bonita Pollock and Tasha Owens, Sarah van Ingen and Susan Ariew, Marryellen Allen, and Adam Berkowitz.

In preparing marketing materials for the event, Berkowitz thought it important to create an eye-catching logo that would convey both the purpose of the event and the fact that this was a joint event being sponsored by USF and FSU. As such, an original logo was designed and used in all marketing materials. All materials were sent to Williams for approval, and so that they could be edited to best suit FSU’s students and faculty. All marketing materials were subsequently e-mailed to all students and faculty members from the School of Information and USF Libraries, and posted to the student organization’s BullSync Web page and Facebook page.

The Symposium

Adam Berkowitz and Adriana Williams arrived at the Marston Science Library before the symposium began in order to prepare the conference room. After breakfast was delivered and the welcome slides were posted, Berkowitz made an introductory statement about the symposium’s conception and objectives, and expressed his gratitude to the faculty members who agreed to present and for Williams’ assistance in organizing the event. Each presentation ran for approximately thirty minutes and was separated intermittently by fifteen-minute breaks which allowed for open discussion, further questions, and opportunities to exchange contact information.

The first presentation was delivered by Sarah van Ingen from USF’s College of Education and Susan Ariew from USF Libraries which discussed how undergraduate students’ questions change throughout the research process. The next presentation was delivered by
Maryellen Allen from USF Libraries on the preliminary results of a survey seeking to discover how instruction librarians prepare themselves for teaching. There was a fifteen-minute break before the next presentation. Following the break, Bonita Pollock and Tasha Owens from USF Libraries presented on how they were incorporating linked data in catalog descriptions of cultural heritage collections which was then followed by a presentation made by Adam Berkowitz on using citation impact to gauge the artistic merit of wind band performance literature. This was proceeded by an hour and a half lunch break which marked the end of the first half of the symposium.

The second half of the symposium began with a presentation by Matt Torrence and John Abresch from USF Libraries discussing evidence based versus patron driven collection development practices for liaison librarians. Next, Plato Smith from UF Libraries spoke about designing and implementing data management plans in libraries. Following this was another fifteen-minute break. Then, the event continued with a presentation made by Ebrahim Randeree from FSU’s College of Communication and Information about best practices for building professional networks utilizing LinkedIn followed by two back-to-back presentations made by Lorri Mon from FSU’s College of Communication and Information about managing makerspaces in academic libraries and a library’s role in and disaster relief efforts. Finally, the symposium concluded with closing remarks made by Williams which included a statement about her perception of the symposium and appreciation for Berkowitz’s assistance in planning the event.

Including the presenters, the symposium attracted approximately thirty-five attendees both in person and online. Most attendees came to listen to specific presentations and then left.
Three times as many people attended physically than virtually with a sharp drop-off in both online and in-person attendance by late afternoon.

**Feedback**

The majority of feedback received about the event was exceptionally positive. UF Libraries faculty members were receptive and excited to be hosting the symposium. They were especially impressed that the creation and organization of the event was overseen by two students from different institutions. A significant portion of the attendees were UF Libraries faculty members who engaged in discussions throughout the day and expressed interest in the possibility of organizing another symposium next year.

The response from USF’s faculty was also just as positive. They were enthusiastic about having an opportunity to discuss their research with colleagues both from their university and other institutions. It was expressed that just because librarians may work in the same library, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they meet to discuss their research outside of their respective departments. Such feedback was confirmation that the symposium had met one of its primary goals.

The feedback from FSU’s faculty was equally positive. One faculty member in particular was interested in discussing the strategies employed in marketing the event and made suggestions for improvement in support for a second symposium. It was continuously acknowledged that having such events take place is important to the future of the LIS field, and the fact that Adriana Williams and Adam Berkowitz took it upon themselves to organize such a multifaceted event demonstrated their commitment to the profession.
Furthermore, USF presenter Susan Ariew published an article about the symposium on the USF Libraries’ Web site. The article names some of the presenters from USF and embodies her enthusiasm for the event.1 Ariew’s article further demonstrates the need for more intercollegiate student sponsored events. Hopefully, with such strong faculty support, the symposium can gain traction as an annual event.

**Suggestions for Improvement**

There were a handful of elements that could be improved upon in order to make the next symposium more successful. These suggested improvements are based on observations and reflections made by Adam Berkowitz and Adriana Williams as well as feedback from attendees. The following is a culmination of the obstacles faced while facilitating the symposium and recommendations for overcoming them in the future.

Both schools of information facilitate distance learning LIS degree programs, and students and faculty interact primarily through virtual means. As such, the majority of advertising was done via e-mail and social media. Students were incentivized to attend by the educational and professional development opportunities presented by this event. Students and faculty were further incentivized by providing opportunities to present on research as well as free food. Opportunities for carpooling were also shared so as to make traveling to the venue easier, and a Google Hangouts link was provided in advance for those who preferred not to travel. Despite all efforts, attendance was lower than projected.

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In order to improve communication and attendance, Berkowitz and Williams think it would be worth exploring how both USF’s and FSU’s School of Information departments responsible for marketing can assist. Also, it might be useful to meet with faculty members to discuss the event so that they can either promote the event in their courses, and/or participate themselves. E-mail and social media are effective in their own right, but more in-person avenues of advertising appear to be necessary.

In addition, the Marston Science Library employs a multimedia system in its conference room, and the learning curve was too steep to sufficiently master the components just prior to the event. As a result, the livestream on Google Hangouts featured only the powerpoint presentations without being able to see any of the presenters; however, the presenters could still be heard. It would benefit the facilitators of the next symposium to arrive well in advance of the event in order to fully explore and understand the available technology. Steps should also be taken to record future symposia and host them on a video streaming site so those who couldn’t attend still have the opportunity to view the presentations, there is a record of the event and what transpired, and presenters can share their presentations.

Finally, because the event was a fair distance away from both universities, the majority of USF presenters left after lunch and the majority of FSU presenters didn’t arrive until before lunch. The symposium began at 8:30 a.m. which proved to be an obstacle for presenters and attendees as UF is approximately two and a half hours away from both universities. Attendees would have to leave their homes before 6:00 a.m. in order to arrive on time. Furthermore, the symposium ended at 4:00 p.m. which made encountering rush-hour traffic on the way home a major concern. In order to address these issues, it may be worthwhile to have the symposium take place over a weekend, or spread the presentations over the course of two days.
Future Partners

The importance of participating in professional associations and professional development events for LIS students cannot be overstated. It is clear that something professional associations such as the FLA and FACRL do well is organize and market major events. These conferences and annual meetings are exceptionally large and complex, and they are seen through to completion on an annual basis. As such, Adam Berkowitz took it upon himself to seek out assistance from the FACRL and FLA executive boards in planning future events.

Contact was made with both the president of FACRL and the president of FLA in an attempt to present an opportunity for the FSU and USF ALA Student Chapters to collaborate with FLA and FACRL in planning an ongoing annual symposium. Future symposia would fulfill a number of different purposes; however, the two primary goals for these events would be to provide professional development opportunities to LIS students at no cost, and to provide opportunities for both FLA and FACRL to engage the student population. As such, the annual symposium would be modeled after FACRL’s annual meeting. It would continue to feature faculty and student presentations, and it would also feature FLA and FACRL board members directly addressing a large audience of LIS students.

The responsibility of planning the annual symposium would continue to fall on the FSU and USF ALA Student Chapter board members, but support and feedback would be required from FLA and FACRL in this partnership. By gaining access to these vast networks of professionals, the scope of the symposium could be widened to include representatives from other institutions, the symposium could take place at other venues and rotate among a group of institutions, and LIS students would be exposed to the research efforts taking place across the state of Florida. Having FLA and FACRL assist with financing the annual symposium would
lead to the ability to facilitate larger gatherings of attendees, and possibly organize transportation for students or reimburse students for travel which would further encourage student participation. Feedback from FLA and FACRL on strategies employed in advertising the symposium would mean producing finer quality marketing materials and better methods for improving attendance.

In return, FLA and FACRL would have direct access to LIS students during the symposium where they can recruit new members. Furthermore, both organizations would be given time to publicly address the attendees in order to raise awareness about the benefits of joining FLA and FACRL. The symposium itself would be an effective recruitment tool for both organizations. At this time, however, both executive boards have indicated that such a partnership is not currently feasible, but they would be open to revisiting the issue in the future.

**Conclusion**

Having the opportunity to create, organize, and facilitate the FSU-USF Intercollegiate Symposium on Library and Information Science was one of the main highlights of Adriana Williams’ and Adam Berkowitz’s experiences as LIS students. It allowed them to exercise their abilities to collaborate on a large-scale project, plan a joint event that included students and faculty from three different universities, analyze and reflect upon feedback on the product of their efforts, and engage faculty members in a way that was unique and beneficial to their academic and professional experiences. This article documents the foundation for an annual intercollegiate symposium on library and information science, and it is the hope of the authors that this vision come to fruition.