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Career Advancement

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Got Skills?

Skillshares Facilitate Communication among LIS Professionals

By Lana Thelen and Jennifer Lege

On September 16, 2005, the Simmons' Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and Simmons' American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) co-hosted a Skillshare. The GSLIS Skillshare, held at Simmons College, provided a forum for people from all levels of librarianship to exchange valuable knowledge and skills. In a skillshare, knowledgeable people conduct round tables where people learn together from participants' experience in any number of fields: one can learn to drive a standard (manual)-shift car or cook a five-course meal. We wanted our skillshare to pass along knowledge about library and information science (LIS) taught at Simmons and in our work experiences. Simmons LIS students are only required to take twelve courses to graduate from the program, five of which are required. There are a multitude of elective courses to choose from, and this event allowed students the opportunity to learn about topics covered in classes they may not have the time or the money to take.

How We Did It

Lana Thelen, chair of the Simmons' PLG, learned about skillshares in her work with other progressive organizations. In April Lana broached the idea to Jennifer Lege, chair of the student chapter of ASIS&T. We met in early August to divide the necessary tasks. We evaluated our resources and decided to reserve four sets of rooms for three blocks of time. In addition to providing space for small lectures and roundtables, we reserved a larger area for the keynote speakers. We invited two keynote speakers from [Radical Reference](#) to teach about the front-end and back-end aspects of running a digital reference service, a topic that appealed to both hosts of the event, PLG and ASIS&T. We also decided to provide lunch, and hired a caterer.

We then recruited teachers. We found these volunteers mainly by word-of-mouth and calls on various listservs. Each teacher created his/her own lesson plan, and in cases where two people were interested in teaching on the same subject, they were paired up and given the opportunity to collaborate on content.

We created a wiki to facilitate planning and advertise the skillshare to both attendees and teachers (<http://gslisskillshare.pbwiki.com>). The wiki proved to be an excellent companion to this event: in addition to exchanging lesson plan ideas, teachers built interest by providing a "sneak peek" of their lesson plans. Simmons faculty and administration supported both the skillshare and our wiki; some Simmons faculty even permitted volunteer teachers to post the professors' syllabi to the wiki to augment the skillshare lesson plan.

Each session lasted approximately forty-five minutes; we allowed ten minutes between sessions for people to switch rooms. Teachers taught on subjects as diverse as international librarianship, intellectual freedom and art documentation. Session content often incorporated handouts, bibliographies and topics for discussion. Source material for the sessions was varied, with teachers drawing from textbooks, syllabi and personal experience. One presenter rejected outside sources and based the session, News Librarianship, purely on the presenter's own experiences, knowledge and desire to share.

A survey was created to gather feedback for future events of this nature. Questions included:

- Which sessions did you attend?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being didn't like and 5 being liked very much, what did you think of the following:
 - Format of classes
 - Types of classes offered

- Date and time of event
- Time of year of event
- Room selections
- Keynote speakers
- What suggestions do you have for us in planning future events similar to this?

How to Make It Your Own

Just as we borrowed the concept of a skillshare from its use in other progressive communities, you can adapt the model to fit the needs of your library or other work setting. The beauty of our skillshare was that it was organized from the ground up; anyone in the library can organize a skillshare. The following guideposts will help you direct a skillshare of your own.

1. **Establish your parameters.**
 - Who is your targeted audience, and what do they want to learn?
 - How many classes will you offer, and in how many fields? Will all workshops be strictly related to library skills, or will you extend your focus to broader skills like leadership or stress management? Will you draw your teachers and/or attendees from your organization, or will you open the skillshare to other libraries, organizations or the public? If you select a keynote speaker, how will his/her message address the broader objectives of your skillshare?
 - When do you want to have the event and where? Will that time slot and location allow the most people you want from a targeted population (i.e., all the catalogers) to attend? How many days and how many hours each day will the skillshare run? If you intend to offer multiple classes during the same time slot, make sure the classes represent a wide variety of subjects. This will allow participants to attend different program tracks.
2. **Evaluate your resources.**
 - What kind of financial/volunteer/moral support can you expect? Skillshares require a lot of planning. Make sure people will support the project and, most importantly, attend.
 - What sort of technology can you use to help facilitate the free sharing of information? Will wikis or other technology will facilitate planning, or will they intimidate people unfamiliar with technology? How can you use different technologies to make the event accessible to persons with disabilities? Do you want these materials to be available to the public, as would happen when training is on the Web? Do you want to record the workshops? If so, do not forget to get presenters' and attendees' consent to be recorded.
3. **Offer incentives and seek means of improvement.**
 - How will you advertise the event to increase the incentive for folks to attend that would benefit most? How will you reward the speakers and participants?
 - What sort of food or refreshments will you offer? Don't forget that full tables and stomachs can keep the event going and entice more people to attend.
 - How will you evaluate the skillshare? If you hope to host another skillshare, provide a forum for participants to suggest improvements.

On the day of the skillshare, greet attendees and give them printed information to take along with them. If you open your skillshare to people outside your organization, consider using nametags so attendees can get to know each other. Finally, as organizers, make sure you enjoy yourself and attend some of the programs. Best of luck with your skillshare!

Lana Thelen is now Deputy Director/Outreach Librarian at Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library in Watertown, MA. **Jennifer Lege** is Information Specialist at Thomson Scientific.

Professional Development

Online Resources

The University of Texas Austin iSchool offers free, comprehensive workshop downloads that address resume and interview preparation. The basics of resumes, cover letters, interviewing and career fair success are described in easy-to-read and colorful handouts by Ronald D. Pollock, Director of Career Services at UT Austin's School of Information. www.ischool.utexas.edu/careers/workshops.php

Rachel Singer Gordon's website www.lisjobs.com is an excellent resource for advice about and articles on librarianship. Featured are sections on interviewing, salaries, early career librarianship and specialties within the profession. Of special interest for job-hunters is a link to **Frequently Asked Interview Questions** reported by students at

the University of South Carolina College of Library and Information Science.

Do you know of other Professional Development resources on the Web? Send us your favorites.

We would love to have your feedback on these articles!

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