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Ensemble Cast: Reinventing First-Year Library Orientation to Feature All Departments

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Abstract

As the year winds down, you may already be planning new student orientation activities to showcase your library and services. This unique program, designed by a committee of departments, offers insight into the types of activities they implemented to help enhance interaction between library staff and students.

Keywords

first year orientation, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, CYC, library departments

Disciplines

Archival Science | Collection Development and Management | Information Literacy | Library and Information Science | Scholarly Communication

Comments

This article is based on the authors' poster presentation at the 2019 ACRL Conference, "[Ensemble Cast: Reinventing First-Year Library Orientation to Feature All Departments.](#)"

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Ensemble cast: Reinventing first-year library orientation to feature all departments
Mallory Jallas and Kevin Moore, Gettysburg College



First-year students explore an exhibit in Special Collections & College Archives.

Gettysburg College is a four-year, residential liberal arts college located in Gettysburg, PA. The institution serves 2,600 undergraduates and welcomes a cohort of around 700 first-year students each fall. During the first week of classes, new students participate in an extended, campus-wide orientation called “Charting Your Course” (CYC), which includes both required and optional activities.

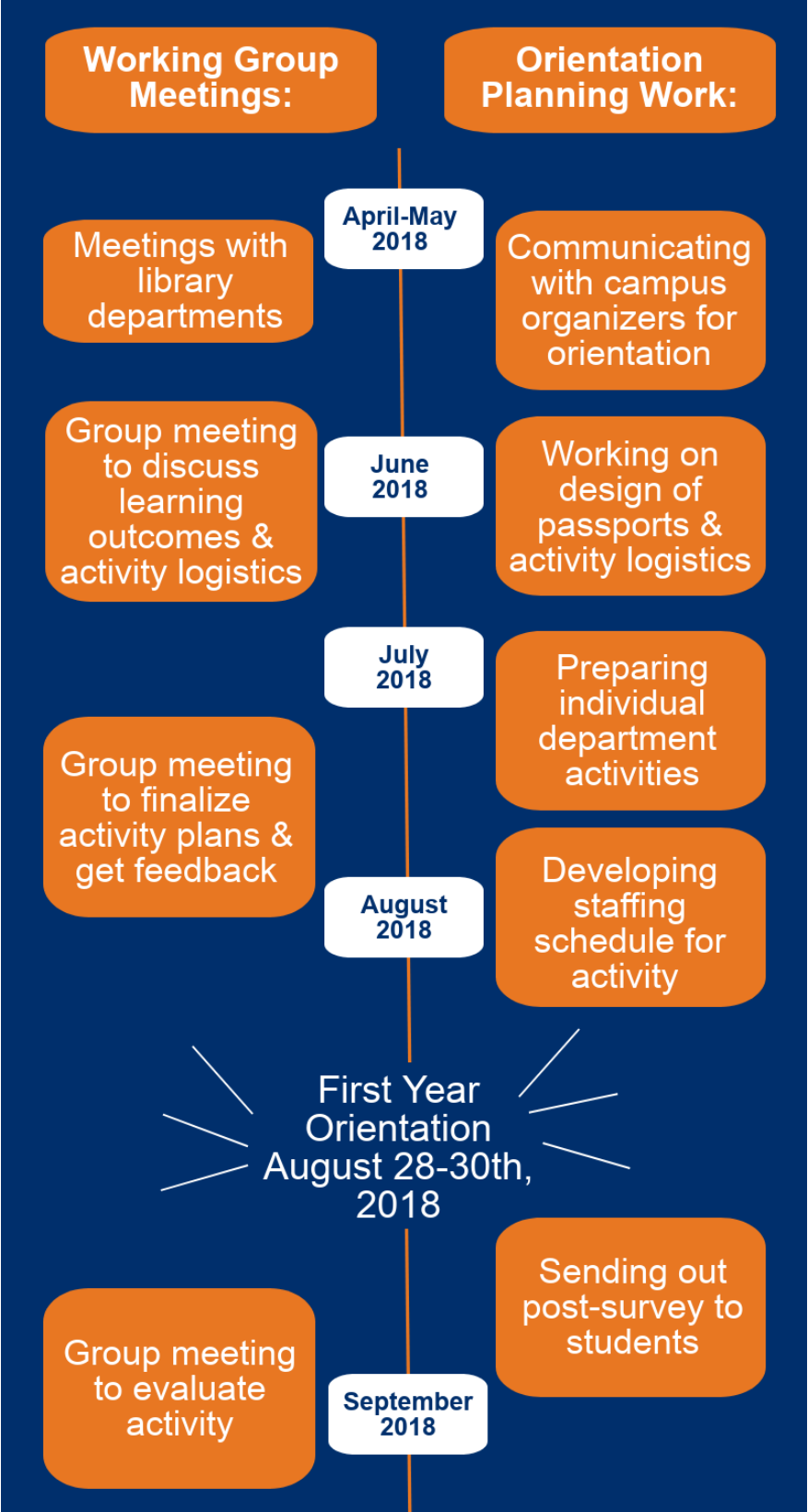
Because the library’s CYC activity is required for students, it represents our largest first-year outreach connection. Musselman Library’s Research & Instruction Department traditionally planned and organized a scavenger hunt-style activity before recruiting library staff from other departments to help with staffing for the event. In the summer of 2018, two librarians (the authors) were tasked to reevaluate the CYC activity for the upcoming fall semester.

Orientation activity changes and library buy-in

In our initial planning, we consulted the literature to learn how other colleges and universities had structured their first-year student orientations. Among our findings were two recurring, major sources of students’ library anxiety: confusion about the location of library service points and uncertainty about who to approach with specific questions (Vrbancic & Byerley, 2018; Collins & Dodsworth, 2011). The findings caused us to question whether Gettysburg College students would benefit more from an orientation that emphasized library departments’ different roles instead of treating the library as a monolithic space. To attempt this, we decided to decentralize our orientation activity’s planning process.

Collaborative orientation planning

After meeting with library departments to discuss past orientations, we asked for one or two members of each department to serve on an orientation activity planning group, which met monthly over the summer. This planning group refined the library activity's learning outcomes and pitched a cohesive vision for the activity's overarching structure while leaving the details of each department's involvement to the individual departments. In the interim, we coordinated with campus partners in College Life and handled other orientation-wide logistics.



The timeline shows the breakdown of the work for the library orientation

Orientation passport activity

For the revised orientation, students could visit the library at any point between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday of the first week of classes. After entering the building, they received [a blank passport document](#) from the check-in desk and were required to visit the following five stations throughout the library, where they would receive a passport stamp after completing a short activity:

- **Scholarly Communications:** Watch a [short narrated video](#) about how The Cupola, Gettysburg College's institutional repository, improves the visibility of student scholarship and speak with Scholarly Communications staff about affordable textbook initiatives
- **User Services:** Play a brief memory-style matching game designed to advertise various items available for loan at the Check Out Desk (e.g., chargers, course reserves, and umbrellas)
- **Research & Instruction:** Spin a wheel at the Research Help Desk and learn about the sort of assistance librarians can provide or the various ways of contacting the Research Help Desk
- **Technical Services:** Visit the Technical Services offices and learn about the breadth of the library's print and digital collections, including streaming film and music, while having an opportunity to activate their *New York Times* pass
- **Special Collections & College Archives:** Students were asked a question (Why wasn't a college yearbook printed in 1919?) that could be answered by consulting the College History collection or by browsing the featured exhibit on World War I

Once students got all five stamps, they could return to the check-in desk, have their ID card scanned, and receive their choice of library swag items. Similar to previous years, the activity could be completed individually or as part of a small group.



Technical Services welcomes first-year students

Feedback, changes for next time, and key takeaways

During the three afternoons, 643 first-year students participated, which represented 85 percent of the first-year class. The library gathered student feedback by reusing the same follow-up survey questions used to assess previous years' CYC activities. The online survey was administered two weeks after the event and had a 15 percent response rate. While the responses were collected solely for internal use, we were pleased with the results.

Library staff members were enthusiastic about the revised format, especially in departments that had been underrepresented in previous orientation activities (i.e., Scholarly Communications and Technical Services) and now had a more equitable platform. Every member of the library's CYC planning group expressed interest in retaining this format for future orientation activities.

In the next iteration, the planning committee will address bottlenecking issues by designing activities that better accommodate small groups or by adjusting the activities to allow students to join midway.

The experience of redesigning the library orientation activity with all departments provided us with more in-depth insight into our colleagues' perspectives on students' information needs. Overall, this experience enhanced the interaction of library staff with first-year students during their orientation.

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Citations and Further Readings:

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