



3-16-2023

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Kevin and Krauss, Hannah, "Checking in without Burning out: Designing Sustainable Assessment Plans for an Undergraduate Peer-to-Peer Research Mentor Program" (2023). *All Musselman Library Staff Works*. 164.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/librarypubs/164>

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Checking in without Burning out: Designing Sustainable Assessment Plans for an Undergraduate Peer-to-Peer Research Mentor Program

Abstract

Learn how librarians developed a programmatic assessment schedule for their undergraduate, peer-to-peer research consultant service with an emphasis on practicality and sustainability. This poster and its supplementary materials present the finished plan, which addresses 13 programmatic learning outcomes over the course of six semesters, offering one model for how to approach a large-scale assessment project systematically and intentionally without burning out library staff.

Keywords

assessment, peer-to-peer learning, peer-to-peer support

Disciplines

Information Literacy | Library and Information Science

Comments

Presented at the 2023 ACRL Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, March 16, 2023

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Checking in Without Burning Out:

Designing Sustainable Assessment Plans for an Undergraduate Peer-to-Peer Research Mentor Program

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Peer Research Mentors

6–8 undergraduate Peer Research Mentors (PRMs) each academic year, overseen by Research & Instruction Department

Program has three central pillars (Baugess et al., 2017; Baugess et al., 2021)

- **Reference desk support** alongside librarians
- Designing and planning library **outreach**
- Ongoing **education and training**

Primary form of assessment was indirect and involved biannual surveys

Revised outcomes in Summer 2021:

- **4 programmatic goals**
 - Research Help
 - Learning Community
 - Programming and Outreach
 - Professional and Academic Development
- **13 programmatic learning outcomes**

Programmatic Assessment

Existing literature on peer research consultants describes evaluating job performance (Borin, 2001) as well as assessing chat reference performance at the undergraduate (Keyes & Dworak, 2017) and graduate (Canuel et al., 2019) levels.

Coordinating a peer research consultant program requires significant time investments in order to train and mentor students (Clark et al., 2020), which is why assessment is important.

Instructional design principles help ensure that outcomes, assessments, and program content align (Fullington & Harrick, 2017).

Starting Points:

- **Regular assessment cycles** can touch on individual elements systematically (Gammons et al., 2018)
- Early on, identify situations where **direct and indirect assessments** would be best (Johnson, 2006)
- Decide when to use holistic vs. analytic **rubrics**, and collaboratively norm when possible (Oakleaf, 2007)

Sem 1: Identifying & Meeting Information Needs

- Provide research and basic technology assistance in multiple modes to a diverse campus population
- Develop awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to work cooperatively with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, cultures, and points of view
- ▲ Use existing technologies ethically and efficiently, and adapt to new and emerging technologies effectively

Sem 2: Navigating Research as a Process

- Apply advanced search strategies and critical evaluation skills in order to assist library users during the research process
- ▲ Apply reasoning and logic to analyze issues, make decisions, and solve problems

Sem 3: Managing Projects

- Design, implement, market, and assess outreach initiatives

Sem 4: Collaborating and Leading

- ▲ Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities
- Develop collaborative relationships with other departments and/or programs on campus in order to maximize learning opportunities for students
- Demonstrate ability for teamwork and collaboration, including organizing, prioritizing, and delegating shared responsibilities

Sem 6: Developing Professionalism

- ▲ Demonstrate ability to communicate effectively and professionally with library users in a variety of settings both in-person and online
- ▲ Articulate values, interests, strengths, and skills as an employee

Sem 5: Acknowledging Information Privilege

- Explain current issues surrounding access and scholarship for users in today's information environment
- ▲ Seek out additional opportunities to further develop research skills and understanding of information issues around access, power, authority, and social justice

Sustainability

This model of conducting systematic assessment in smaller pieces throughout each semester allows librarians to make a deeper investigation of the outcomes to specific programmatic goals.

At the same time, shifting away from the biannual direct assessment using surveys has several key benefits for assessment sustainability:

- Peer Research Mentors are **less likely to experience survey fatigue**
- Assessing manageable chunks throughout the semester, rather than all at once, leads to **less stress and burnout** for librarians
- Makes it **easier to deliver regular updates** about meeting programmatic goals and outcomes.

Model in Other Contexts

Questions to ask :

- Who is asking to see assessment data?
- What reporting obligations already exist?
- What resources can you dedicate to assessment?
- How will you share assessment findings?
- What changes would you be able to make or advocate for based on assessment results?

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● Research Help ●

▲ Learning Community ▲

■ Programming and Outreach ■

▲ Professional and Academic ▲