
Fox @ the Fireside

Using Strategic Marketing & Outreach to Foster Authentic Scholarly Conversations in the Library

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This session highlights the strategic marketing, intentional outreach through liaisons, and event planning that went into developing “Fox @ the Fireside,” shares about the program, and invites conversations about other opportunities that might exist for libraries to host and engage in scholarly discussions around campus. Fox @ the Fireside is an event hosted by the George Fox University librarians each semester, designed to showcase the intellectual and creative output of a campus community member or group (student, staff, faculty) and invite the university community to participate in conversation centered around a topic of campus-wide interest. Past programs have showcased art, books, and even LEGO® creations! Through this event, we have created a hospitable, inviting, inclusive space for conversation that furthers the library’s mission to be a place for holistic connection, innovative creation, and authentic contribution.

Poster available at: <https://sched.co/NqxX>

IDEATION

In 2017, the George Fox University Libraries welcomed a new dean. The library went through a staff reorganization process and revised the mission and vision statements. Our new mission is *to be a place for holistic connection, innovative creation, and authentic contribution*. This new strategic direction prompted us to do some internal reflection:

- How do we engage and direct our community towards connection, creation, and contribution?
- How can we showcase intellectual output of our amazing students, staff, and faculty?

We developed the Fox @ the Fireside program with the vision of creating space for the community to come together, connect, learn about the work of someone in the community, and discuss a topic of interest. We wanted to foster scholarly conversations in a “town square” space, and the library fireside—an open, central spot in the library—was the perfect location! We also hoped this event would address two common perceptions:

- The library is only a storehouse of books and quiet place to study.
- Librarians are purveyors of books and keepers of silence.

PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

We launched a pilot in April 2018 to test out the event model in the library space. After a successful launch, I created the 2018–19 academic year’s program, scheduling three speakers. As part of this process, I created two checklists for library event planning:

Pre-Event Checklist:

- Check possible event dates with campus calendars and other partners
- Arrange and confirm speakers
- Order coffee and treats from campus caterer
- Arrange additional furniture/technology with Event Services and Information Technology
- Write event messaging for website and all marketing outlets
- Add event to library calendar (we use LibCal)
- Share event messaging with Academic Affairs, campus news, and other partners
- Design, print, distribute posters and digital posters (slides) for campus monitors
- Design and schedule social media posts
- Create in-library directional signage for the event

- Create LibGuide (if applicable)
- Purchase speaker's books (if applicable)
- Gather speaker biography introduction and picture for marketing purposes
- The host librarian should meet with speaker to discuss format and event outline
- Create event feedback survey for participants

Day of Event Checklist:

- Post room reservation signs and directional signage (if applicable)
- Arrange furniture one hour before event
- Meet caterer for set up
- Post getting ready (hype-building) posts on social media before event starts
- Get water for speaker and help them get ready
- Greet attendees
- The host librarian runs the program (welcome guests, introduce speaker, facilitate Q&A)
- Share feedback survey with participants
- Post a "thank you" on social media after event

MARKETING

As coordinator for all library marketing, I create all of the print and digital marketing materials using Canva, a free online design software. However, some campuses have a marketing and communications department that manages this work, so my recommendation is that you find out what your campus resources are before doing the design work. It can save you time!

If you are doing the designing, here are some additional considerations I recommend, especially if you do not have a design background:

- Follow your institution's brand and design guidelines
- Review basic design tutorials online
- Follow elements and principles of design
- Tweak templates (like the free ones in Canva) to make them fit your brand

- Schedule social media posts
 - I use Hootsuite to schedule posts for Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. There are many free options for scheduling!
- Leverage your network to spread the word:
 - The library dean promoted this event to the university's Academic Leadership Team, a team made up of other department deans and the provost
 - Librarians promoted event to their liaison departments

For this marketing campaign, I created social media posts, posters, and digital posters, and sent an info notice to our daily campus news editor. Find out what communication channels exist on your campus to get the word out.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

One of the challenges with Fox @ the Fireside was figuring out how to find speakers and discerning what topics might interest the community.

One way that we went about this work was through strategic listening. Librarians shared with me what conversations they were aware of on campus with faculty and students and what things people in various departments were working on. One of the benefits of embedding librarians in academic departments is a heightened awareness of interesting projects faculty and students are working on. These connections led to some exciting opportunities!

In addition to leveraging our partnerships with departments, we also are intentional about looking for partners and collaborators on campus. For example, I work with student life, the academic resource center, and other campus groups to engage with the community and find spaces for collaboration on mutually beneficial, innovative projects that ultimately help us achieve exceptional life outcomes for our students.

The pilot event was born out of this kind of connection. In 2018, faculty and staff were participating in book discussion groups, reading *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2015). A staff member (and artist) participating in a group created an art show in response to the book and its impact on her. The Associate Provost of Local and

Global Engagement asked the library if we had a venue to have her display her art work. We said yes, and offered an opportunity to not only display the work, but also share with the community and foster further discussion as a Fox @ the Fireside guest.

As the program gains momentum, we are looking at ways to make the process for bringing in speakers equitable across departments.

THE 2018–19 PROGRAM

Our 2018–2019 academic year featured two faculty speakers and one student, on a variety of topics.

- November 2018: Guadalupe García McCall, Professor of English & Author
 - This event featured her award-winning Young Adult fiction novels, one which published at the time of the event.
 - Books featured:
 - *All the Stars Denied* (Tu Books, 2018)
 - *Shame the Stars* (Tu Books, 2016)
 - *Summer of the Mariposas* (Tu Books, 2012)
 - *Under the Mesquite* (Lee and Low Books, 2011)
 - She talked about Latinx fiction and the fiction writing process, discussed themes from her novels such as Mexico and Texas border history, and shared some tips for aspiring authors.
- January 2019: Melanie Springer Mock, Professor of English & Author
 - This event featured her book, *Worthy: Finding Yourself in a World Expecting Someone Else* (Herald Press, 2018).
 - She discussed themes from her book including identity, self-worth, and how all people are worthy of love.
- April 2019: Grant Davis, George Fox University College of Engineering Student
 - This event featured his LEGO IDEAS Pop-Up Book creation.
 - He discussed the process of designing the pop-up book and his journey to working with LEGO on this project.

RESULTS AND RESPONSES

Assessment is a key aspect of library programming. For the 2018–19 year, we created a guest survey for event participants.

Survey Questions:

- I am a ___ (student, faculty, staff).
- How satisfied are you with the event overall?
- Did you check out the resource page created for this event (LibGuide)?
- How did you hear about this event?
- Did you learn something new?
- How engaging was the topic of conversation?
- How likely are you to attend another Fox @ the Fireside?
- Any questions for us?
- Anything else you would like us to know?

Informal Qualitative Assessment:

We had few survey results, but did record a number of positive comments from faculty. Here are some examples:

- “I can tell the library has been really intentional about being a part of the community. Thank you for your work supporting students.”
- “I appreciate your work this year engaging with the scholarly life of George Fox and highlighting the work of my colleagues.”

For the 2019–20 year, we plan to look at other options for gathering survey results such as using a guest list, so that we can send the survey to participants following the event, or administering paper surveys before guests leave.

REFLECTION

Finally, I met with the dean at the end of the year to reflect on the 2018–19 program and discuss how effective we were at achieving our objectives. Some key observations we made about the Fox @ the Fireside Program:

- We did successfully engage faculty, staff, and community members with the events.
- The events were hosted right at the center of the library and by the last event of the year, people were engaging in the margins of the room, grabbing coffee and chatting about the conversation in progress.
- Event attendance grew and student participation increased with each event.
- We want to continue building the conversational aspects of the event, looking for more ways to engage the audience.

The event was part of a larger initiative to welcome students to campus, and engage more intentionally with faculty partners, building relationships with them and establishing trust. We believe the program effectively raised the visibility of library faculty this year on campus, and we look forward to expanding involvement of students, finding more student presenters next year!