



Tips from the Experts

If You Build It, They Will Come: Orienting New Science Graduate Students to the Library

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Abstract

Opportunities for the UCLA Science Librarians to connect with new graduate students have dwindled over the years. After struggling to be included in department orientation sessions, we decided to create an orientation fair of our own, now one of our most successful outreach events to connect with new students.

Introduction

In the past 10 years at the UCLA Science and Engineering Library, librarians have seen a substantial shift in our inclusion in departmental organized activities during UCLA's welcome and orientation weeks. In the past, librarians were invited by individual academic departments to come speak to new graduate students, inform them of our resources and services, instruct them on the use of our databases and catalogs, and reinforce how they could get help. This face-to-face contact was considered crucial in forming relationships with new students, teaching assistants, and faculty. Over the years, departments just stopped inviting us. At first, library orientation sessions got shorter and shorter; then, invites disappeared altogether. Our solution? Design our own orientation fair, and have the students come to us. This article details a successful outreach event hosted by the UCLA Science Libraries in order to strengthen connections with our new students and ensure their academic success.

Background

When the science librarians first noticed a drop-off of invitations to department orientation sessions, we were at a loss of what to do. A few of us sent along flyers with links to LibGuides and information about where to get help, with hopes the students would still get the help they needed. However, most of our librarians still felt that the initial face-to-face connection with students was still necessary. A study by Sadler and Given ([2007](#)) showed that, historically, libraries have put less efforts into outreach to graduate students, but when they do, graduate students are more likely to consult librarians in the research process. Less outreach to graduate students might come from erroneous assumptions that they are already familiar with library collections and services; however, an extensive survey done by Maughan ([1999](#)) at UC Berkeley

revealed that over half of graduate students had insufficient knowledge of library instruction and consultation services, as well as other services such as interlibrary loan. Connecting early with the students is also key. Cecelia M. Brown ([1999](#)) found in her study of the information literacy competency of physical science graduate students that they are more receptive to library instruction at the beginning of their careers. Graduate students also have diverse needs that differ from undergraduates. To fulfill these needs, we devised the *New Sciences Graduate Student Resource Fair*, designed to raise awareness of all of the services available to them throughout their academic career.

Stations

Initially, our idea for the fair was to have a series of lecture style presentations for students to attend. However, we decided this might not be interactive enough to engage the students, so instead we planned a “tabling” type set-up, where students could walk to various stations and learn about library services. Science librarians, access-services staff, other public-service librarians, and library students have all taken part in staffing the event. Our orientation stations at the fair have changed over time. Currently we feature:

- **Research it:** Science librarians provide information on how to do basic research in the sciences, including sources and tools by discipline, LibGuides, off-campus access, and how to find top journals in their field.
- **Find it:** Access services staff demonstrate how to check out books, rooms, and laptops. They also teach how to use our catalogs, create an ILL request, and page an item from our storage facility.
- **Research data management and citation management:** Librarians explain what data management is and how the library can help. Citation management tools and resources are also covered.
- **Use it & share it:** Scholarly communications and copyright librarians are on hand to explain the basics of copyright and fair use. They also explain open-access mandates and creative-commons licenses.
- **Business information for scientists:** Our business librarian provides information to engineers interested in obtaining an MBA.
- **3D printing demo:** Our UCLA Library makerspace, the Lux Lab, provides 3D-printer demos and promotes the Lux Lab services, which are free to students.

Each station is equipped with a digital monitor and a whiteboard. In addition to the stations above, we also have a monitor playing our UCLA Library YouTube channel on loop, which showcases our Writing and Research Education (WI+RE) videos and online-learning modules.

In addition to the learning stations, we also have several interactive areas. Last year, we featured several whiteboards polling students on their research habits. We also featured a large map for students to pin where they completed their undergraduate education, to demonstrate the diversity of our graduate-student community. Lastly, students could spin a prize wheel to win some of our elite vendor swag. In order to win the prize, they must answer a question from one of our stations, demonstrating what they learned at the fair.

In order to market the fair, we offered swag and refreshments to draw students in. To obtain the swag, each librarian contacted resources in their discipline area (Reaxys, IEEE, Springer, etc.) and asked the vendors to send swag to give out at the fair. We distributed the swag at all the stations, and it was a huge hit with students. In terms of refreshments, we offered some modest snacks for the first few years, but last year discovered that pizza was a real draw!

Promotional flyers for the event are sent to all of our academic departments. In addition, we advertise the event on our social media channels, on our website, emails to department listservs and campus partners, and with digital and physical signage. We also hand out flyers at other general orientation events, such as our New Bruin Welcome and the Engineering School Orientation.

Hosting this fair over the past few years, we have learned some lessons in how to increase attendance and engagement. First, as mentioned above, offering pizza over snacks was a huge draw. Also, make sure to check when other campus events are happening when planning a time and date, to ensure the highest participation rate possible. Lastly, students love interactive activities. Try to provide a mix of interactive content along with just providing information. One unexpected result of this fair is it also allows students to interact with and meet each other.

Conclusion

Our *New Sciences Graduate Student Resource Fair* has been one of the UCLA Science and Engineering Library's most successful outreach events. We have seen increased attendance over the years, with over 125 attendees in 2018. We have also expanded the fair to include more departments. Last year we combined efforts with the UCLA Biomedical Library to offer one fair for all new science graduate students. We distributed assessment forms both at the event (to students) and post-event (to staff) and have received positive feedback from both. This fair gives us a unique opportunity to connect with new graduate students in a way that is both fun and informative.

References

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