Assessing the Impact of a Digital Humanities Summer Research Program

Carrie Pirmann, Bucknell University and Courtney Paddick, Bloomsburg University

Background

In 2017, librarians at Bucknell University developed a librarian-led undergraduate digital scholarship research program. We created the **Digital Scholarship Summer Research Fellows (DSSRF)** program to broaden research opportunities for students and introduce them to new ways of engaging in scholarship. The eight week program provides students with an opportunity to undertake independent research on a topic of their own choosing, and utilize digital humanities tools and methodologies to both answer questions and convey their research findings.Here, we examine the lasting impacts of DSSRF on the participants. We surveyed past fellows to understand how their participation and the skills they acquired were applicable to their subsequent coursework and career paths, and how the program influenced their thinking about scholarship.
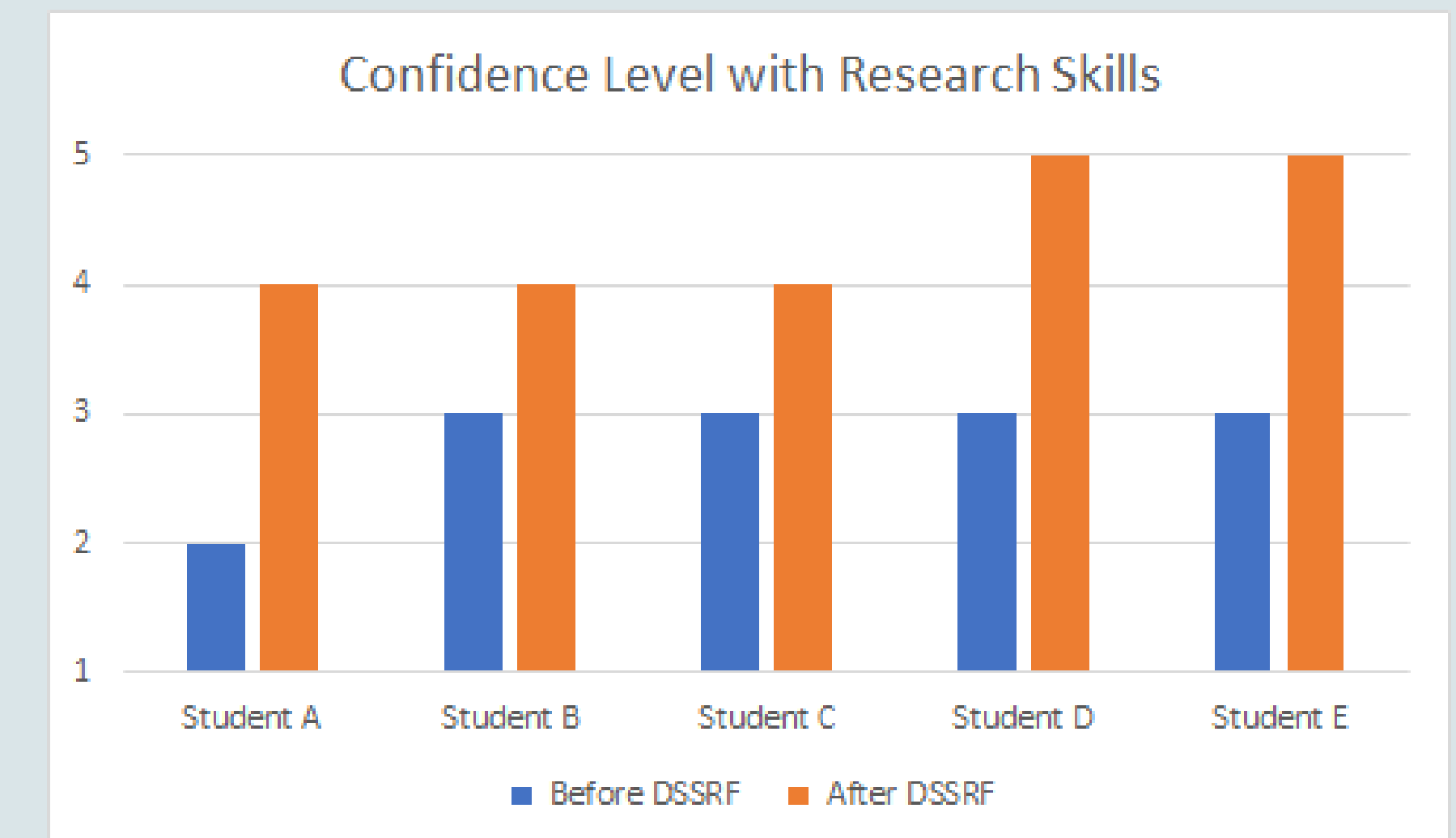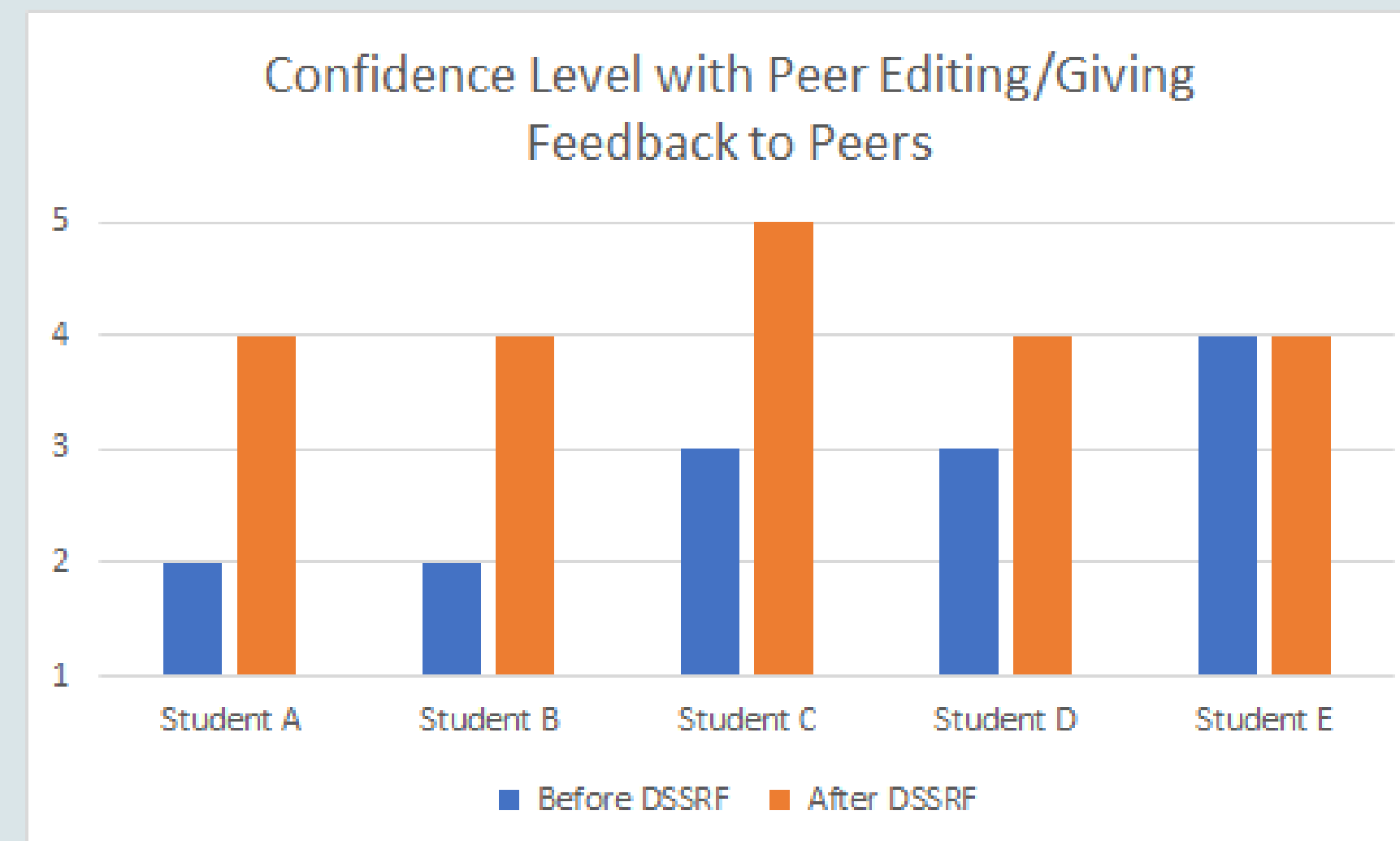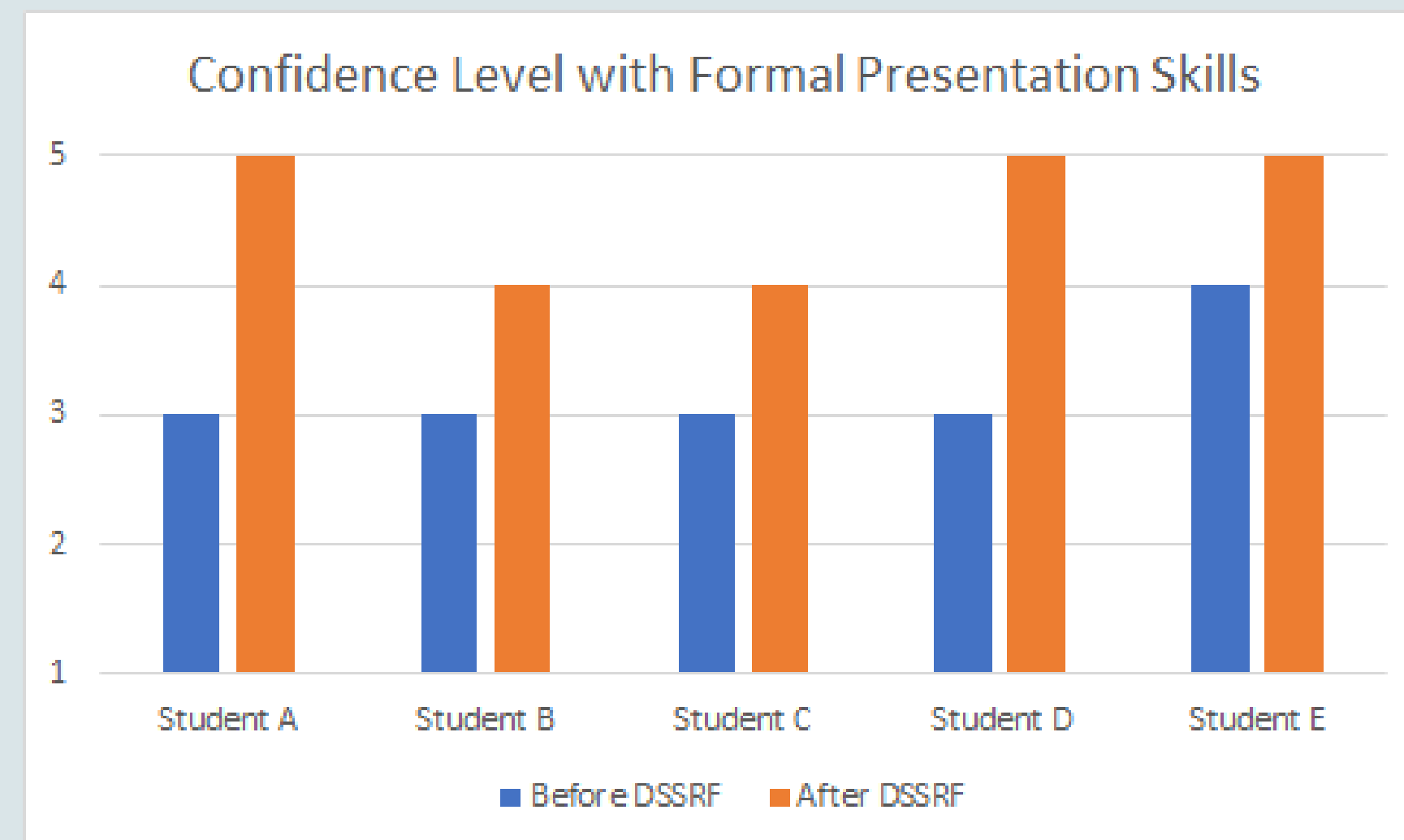
Academic/Career Impacts

Several students reported the program influenced their choice of majors, minors, and/or career paths. Some examples:
- One student leveraged his newly developed data visualization skills and showcased his project on the job market, and was hired by a sports analytics firm
- One student decided to pursue a graduate degree in library science after learning about archives and special collections
- One student, who is pursuing a career in market research, credited DSSRF with both confirming her decision to major in economics, and kick-starting her interest in data visualization
- Two undeclared students indicated participation in DSSRF helped confirm their choice of major

Self-Assessment

We asked students to assess their confidence levels, before and after DSSRF, with a variety of research and soft skills. These charts represent the areas in which students displayed the greatest amount of growth. (1 = not at all confident; 5 = extremely confident)

Confidence Level with Formal Presentation Skills

Confidence Level with Peer Editing/Giving Feedback to Peers

Confidence Level with Research Skills

Reflections

"DSSRF made me realize that research has no limits. You can conduct research in any field, and add to it through it being in a digital form. I think it's the research of the future."

"I think that the biggest impact that the program had was about how presentation of scholarship might change and expand to allow for more collaboration, and what this could be used for in different situations."

Future Directions

Responses to the survey have proven very helpful as we look forward to future iterations of the program. Based on student feedback, we know they found field trips, interactions with peers and members of Library and IT, and work on their individual projects to be the most impactful aspects of DSSRF. Students found the weekly blog posts and assigned readings to be the least helpful parts of the program, so these will certainly be areas to revise moving forward. Based on the results of the survey, we have also identified the tools students most frequently gravitate towards for their own projects as well as tools they have used after DSSRF, and we will use this information to make decisions on the tools and techniques included in the future.