

Sara Davidson Squibb and Elizabeth Salmon

Pick and choose

Offering options to expand library sessions for undergraduate researchers

For a number of years, librarians at the University of California-Merced (UC-Merced) have provided research-focused instruction during a weeklong training bootcamp for undergraduate students participating in the Summer Undergraduate Research Institutes (SURI). Based on students' feedback and library instructors' post-session discussions, librarians have modified library session content and delivery options. In the past two years, sessions were offered in a mini-conference style, allowing students to select those of most relevance to their own interests and desired learning experiences. Both librarian instructors and student attendees have reacted positively to this "you choose" format in both face-to-face and online environments. In this article we will outline the development of the program and speak to anticipated enhancements for future offerings.

Background

UC-Merced is known for an emphasis on undergraduate research, with 18% of juniors and seniors reporting that they have conducted their own research under faculty guidance.¹ Since 2016, UC-Merced librarians have been collaborating with our Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center (UROC) to develop students' abilities to find, evaluate, and manage information as part of their broader participation in SURI, a competitive multidisciplinary research program.² In the past two years, more than 100 students have participated in SURI annually, with the majority of participants heading into their third or fourth year at UC-Merced. The SURI training program is frontloaded, featuring a week-long bootcamp on a wide range of topics, including research-focused workshops offered by librarians, before students begin their summerlong research projects guided by faculty mentors.

In the past, our usual practice during the SURI bootcamp had been to prepare a shared lesson plan that all librarians used with SURI students. We preassigned librarians and a cohort of students to a room for duration of the full session duration. We have experimented with this primary model throughout the years. At times, we've had one colleague responsible for teaching a bibliographic management tool, visiting each cohort for a "guest lecture."

We observed that students had varying levels of familiarity with library resources and research competencies based on a number of factors, including year of study, field of study,

Sara Davidson Squibb is head of research and learning services, email: sdavidson2@ucmerced.edu, and Elizabeth Salmon is research services librarian, email: esalmon@ucmerced.edu, at the University of California-Merced Library.

and whether their previous instructors encouraged or required the use of library resources and services. This is not an uncommon challenge in any type of information literacy instruction. We tried to minimize some variations by pre-grouping student participants by characteristics such as discipline (social science vs. STEM students) or prior campus affiliation (local students vs. visiting students). However, these remained imperfect groupings and were complicated by logistical challenges, such as the number of instruction rooms and seats available. We also found that the three-hour block felt long even though we incorporated activities, included breaks, and ended with a review game. In addition, we knew that this was just one of multiple sessions they were experiencing in the same week.

Offering students choice

Though aware that we might not be able to meet every student at their exact level, we considered how we might give students more flexibility by allowing them to choose the sessions that appealed most to their interests and anticipated needs. Though this degree of choice could not be classified as true student agency, where students take on responsibility for their own learning,³ nor replicate the level of choice within a single session outlined by Tracey Mayfield and Katy Farrell French in “Letting the Inmates Run the Asylum: Student Engagement in the Progressive Classroom,”⁴ we thought this format could provide students some level of autonomy during a highly scheduled week of required training. Since agency is known to enhance motivation, even some level of choice might increase students’ learning engagement.⁵

Take 1: In-person

In light of these experiences and observations, we offered a different training format for our undergraduate researchers in summer 2019. We held all sessions face-to-face in library spaces, using four rooms on a single floor. We prepared four different sessions, and all ran concurrently in three consecutive time slots, with a few minutes between each to allow students to change location. We asked students to select and attend the three sessions that most interested them. In many ways, this mimicked how a mini-conference might feel--selecting desired sessions and making your way to the appropriate location. Students received advance notification of session offerings through an announcement by UROC, and they were asked to complete some prework, setting up the Virtual Private Network (VPN) and signing up for a RefWorks account. The four sessions were as follows:

- “Find What You’re Looking For. Locating Known Items.”
- “Building a Bibliography for Your Faculty Mentor? Use RefWorks!”
- “Find Your Databases(s)!”
- “True Detective: Investigating Your Sources”

To obtain feedback on the sessions, we asked students in the final time slot to drop off paper feedback forms at a designated location. We offered candy as a thank you. We did not ask them to comment on the conference-style format, but the librarian teaching team members gave positive feedback on this format in our own debrief.

Take 2: Online

Fast forward to 2020. Our librarians transitioned to remote work in March, and UROC also pivoted their work, which included limiting program participation to our university's students. Wrapping up the spring semester remotely gave librarians opportunities to become increasingly familiar with using Zoom for instructional purposes. When it became apparent that our library sessions for UROC participants would need to be delivered online, we chose to deliver library sessions in a similar format to the previous year but within a shorter time frame: two instead of three hours. Students would still attend three sessions, but we were

Orientation Sessions

- A Using What You Know: How To Find Known Items
- B Using RefWorks to Manage Your Research & Cite Sources
- C Be a Social Success! Social Sciences Databases and Resources
- D STEM Databases and Resources
- E True Detective: Investigating Your Sources

Figure 1. Sessions offered summer 2020.

able to increase our offerings to five choices, splitting up our previous database session into two separate ones: “Be a Social Success! Social Sciences Databases and Resources” and “STEM Databases and Resources.” (See Figure 1.)

Since we shortened our sessions, we provided pre-work through the SURI online course to address basic skills, such as connecting to resources from off-campus, accessing article full-text, and locating and selecting databases. One of our librarians took the lead in creating introductory slides that we all used in the first session to provide students with a brief explanation of workshop logistics and to prime them for an exit survey at the end of our time together (see Figure 2). To accommodate this introduction, we allotted a slightly longer time slot for the first session.

Logistics






-  Select 3 out of 5 sessions to attend.
-  Each session is 30- 35 minutes long.
-  Each session is presented via Zoom. Zoom links for all sessions are posted in the chat and on the SURI CatCourses page.
-  Password for all sessions: SURI2020 (all capitals, no spaces). You may not be prompted for a password.
-  At the end of your 3rd session, we would like to hear about your experience participating in this orientation via a short survey.

Figure 2. Logistics slide from introductory material.

Each librarian instructor had a co-host, a UROC or library staff volunteer, to help answer questions, monitor chat, and keep students informed with messages such as, “We are starting soon” or “Wrapping up shortly.” We really appreciated

their support as the sessions were brief (30-to-35 minutes) and turnaround time between sessions was minimal. Librarians also planned to use Slack for behind-the-scenes communication, though we did not use this extensively. In the final session, we intentionally allowed time for exit slip submission and placed the survey link into the chat. This time we asked students if they liked the ability to select the sessions they wanted to attend. More than 95% indicated *Yes*, while the remainder selected *Somewhat*. No respondents disliked this format.

Further revisions

For the next academic year, offered this conference-style format again with some adjustments. For example, we leveraged updated functionality in Zoom that allows students to select their desired breakout room(s) within a *single* Zoom meeting. In the past, we had to prepare a separate Zoom link for each of the five sessions and compile these onto a master library guide and shared them with students during the workshop via chat. This meant that students had to enter/exit three Zoom meeting links. We hoped this newer Zoom functionality should make attendance and session navigation much easier. In 2021, we offered sessions for 90 SURJ participants using a single Zoom link with breakout rooms.

Based on our debrief notes from the previous year, post-program survey data, and time parameters, we made some additional adjustments and enhancements to our overall offerings. We hoped to coordinate with UROC to expand our time allotment so that our sessions have more breathing room. While we initially shortened the workshop to minimize Zoom fatigue, students and librarian instructors commented that some sessions felt rushed. However, since we still were working within a two-hour time frame, we maximized our time together through preparing a short introductory video that students watched in advance. This served to introduce students to the librarians leading the sessions and pointed students to library pre-activities. We also re-evaluated our content and offered eight different sessions during the two-hour orientation.

Student program feedback from 2020 highlighted that many used Mendeley for their summer projects. As a result, we decided to offer bibliographic management sessions for Zotero and Mendeley, along with RefWorks, within our first session slot. Based on this year's survey data, we found that 100% of students appreciated the ability to choose the sessions they wished to attend. Though we did not incorporate an archival session into this configuration, we are pleased to report that our colleagues in Digital Curation and Scholarship prepared sessions for humanities students with a focus on archival research.

Conclusion

Overall, both our students and our team of librarians have enjoyed the conference-style library session offerings. Students can select those sessions of most interest, and librarians can focus on preparing a single session. In addition to positive feedback on this delivery format, a large majority of the student undergraduate researchers have reported that the skills and strategies they learned in the library sessions helped them find and use resources during their summer research. Our partnership with UROC has been a fruitful one with a common goal of building the research competencies of our undergraduate students.

Going forward, we are also exploring how we might better meet the needs of students working on archival projects by expanding our offerings in support of humanities-focused

research. This may involve recruiting additional colleagues to contribute to our current menu of offerings. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with UROC and supporting students' research needs with relevant and engaging session choices. To view the latest version of our concurrent sessions, visit our research guides and search for SURI.⁶ We will continue to adapt and improve future sessions as we work with the growing undergraduate research program.

Notes

1. University of California, Institutional Research and Decision Support, "University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) 2018 High Impact Practices Dashboard," 2018, <https://visualizedata.ucop.edu>.
2. Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center (UROC), "Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI)," accessed December 11, 2020, <https://uroc.ucmerced.edu/suri>.
3. Mark Wagner, "What Does Student Agency Mean?" EdTechTeam, November 3, 2016, <https://www.edtechteam.com/blog/2016/11/what-does-student-agency-mean/>.
4. Engagement in the Progressive Classroom," LOEX Conference Proceedings 2009, <https://commons.emich.edu/loexconf2009/>.
5. Robb Lindgren and Rudy McDaniel, "Transforming Online Learning through Narrative and Student Agency," *Educational Technology & Society* 15, no. 4 (2012): 346, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/jeductechsoci.15.4.344.pdf>.
6. UC Merced Library, "Library Research Guides," December 4, 2020, <https://libguides.ucmerced.edu/course>. *zz*