Poster Competitions: Teaching Effective Scholarly Communication

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Poster Competitions
Teaching Effective Scholarly Communication

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BACKGROUND
Scholarly communication is at the heart of science. Poster sessions are a time-honored method of presenting research results in a visually appealing, concise format. However, designing scientific posters that are both informative and easy to navigate can be a daunting task, even for the most experienced researcher. What role does the academic library play to help students learn the artful skill of conveying complex scientific results in a clear and succinct poster presentation?

METHODS
Collaboration between College of Life Sciences and BYU Library

Library contributions
- Teach poster design workshops
- Provide venue to display posters and hold competition
- Arrange poster competition adjudication
- Host open house and awards reception

College contributions
- Fund prize awards for winning posters
- Promote poster submissions within college
- Encourage student and faculty mentor attendance at open house

Poster design workshops
- Invited students to attend at time of registration
- Taught two 50-minute sessions in library
  - Session 1: Poster content elements and messaging
  - Session 2: Design principles and tools

Poster competition
Preparation
- Provided discounted poster printing in library
- Displayed posters in high-traffic area of library for two weeks prior to open house

Poster judging
- Evaluated poster organization, appearance, & content
- Averaged scores from three science librarian judges
- Judging rubric and registration information available at: http://guides.lib.byu.edu/2017LS_PosterComp

Assessment & Follow-up
- Emailed poster feedback to students from judges
- Highlighted winning posters in science area of library
- Invited competition participants to upload posters to library’s online digital repository
  https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/library_studentposters/

RESULTS
Positive student outcomes
- Received constructive feedback on poster before presenting research at scientific conferences
- Learned poster design skills to present research in clear and impactful way
- Improved scholarly communication skills for general academic audience
- Submitted poster to digital repository with link for résumé

Positive institutional outcomes
- Fostered greater collaboration between library and academic colleges and departments
- Showcased current campus research in library
- Developed partnership to teach scholarly communications to students

CONCLUSIONS
Student researchers typically need additional support communicating complex scientific findings. At academic institutions, librarians and other educators can facilitate hands-on learning opportunities to improve student scientific information literacy and communication.

Important considerations:
- Consider academic timing of event (Spring better than Fall)
- Incorporate meaningful teaching opportunities (e.g., workshop, judging feedback)
- Include participation incentives (e.g., awards, poster archiving)