


 CUR Focus on the Web


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Thinking Big: Celebration of Scholarship Stimulates Undergraduate Research at a Small Public University

Located in a rural area near the geographic center of Pennsylvania, Lock Haven University (LHU) is one of 14 institutions that make up the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. During the 2007-08 academic year, LHU employed 265 full-time unionized faculty members and served approximately 4,700 students on its main campus and another 400 students on a branch campus in Clearfield, about 60 miles west of Lock Haven. The university has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on quality classroom teaching—sometimes at the expense of a faculty member's own research interests. Indeed, criteria for promotion and tenure have overwhelmingly emphasized teaching effectiveness.

Since 2000, dramatic changes in the faculty—due to retirements, increased enrollments, and responses to two faculty union contracts—have resulted in many new tenure-track faculty lines. In addition, during the last four years, the university welcomed a new president, two new provosts, and two new academic deans. Such changes over a relatively short period prompted discussions about ways to reassess the balance between teaching and research and ways to broaden the more traditional concepts of scholarship, research, and teaching. Both faculty members and administrators began viewing scholarship in terms of “the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching” as proposed in “Scholarship Reconsidered,” by Ernst Boyer (1997). In addition, they began examining how a Boyer-based view of scholarship, when modified with revised faculty evaluation criteria, could encourage and empower instructors to engage students in discipline-related investigations, thus strengthening the overall educational experiences of students. These discussions have led to a re-envisioning of the role, scope, and direction of the university and to a day designated as Celebration of Scholarship.

In 2006, a group of faculty members and administrators examined ways to stimulate student scholarly activities outside the classroom through more faculty-student collaborations. Initially, the committee examined opportunities available to those students interested in scholarly and creative activities associated with their major or other interests. Some faculty members already were actively engaging students in research

both inside and outside of the classroom, but relatively few of the student projects were receiving public recognition. Faculty members who were involved in publicly showcasing such efforts reported that students' responses to the scholarly and creative opportunities were very positive.

The focus group concluded that research and other scholarly opportunities must become more generally available to a broader group of students, especially those majoring in the arts, humanities, education, and social and health sciences. The group felt that publicly showcasing students' work on a single day would encourage more faculty members to engage students in scholarly activities. By expanding existing models, the committee could build on two important established models to reach their goal: 1) involving students in independent research outside of the classroom, and 2) devising innovative strategies for students to experience research or other creative efforts inside the classroom.

As a result, LHU's first Celebration of Scholarship (COS) was held on April 25, 2007, during which more than 700 students and 72 faculty members from 35 disciplines collaborated to “celebrate” their achievements through poster and platform sessions, demonstrations, performances, TV broadcasts, and panel discussions. What the community learned from this inaugural event and how the planning committee incorporated those experiences led to an even more successful celebration on April 23, 2008. In this essay, we outline how COS improved scholarly achievement over a broad range of disciplines and suggest how to plan similar events at other institutions.

Establishing Goals and Assessments

The heart of a university is its faculty and students, but its soul is found in the discipline-based scholarly activities pursued by both of these groups. The initial reason for establishing the COS was rather simple: to promote a sense of pride and accomplishment by showcasing the quality and breadth of student and faculty scholarship. This purpose was further articulated by setting the following goals:

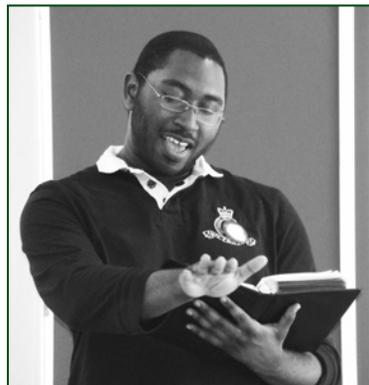
1. Expanding research opportunities for students;

2. Providing a platform for students and faculty members to engage in inquiry, apply critical-thinking skills, and learn about research beyond their own disciplines;
3. Encouraging effective technological and presentational skills for defending research and promoting intellectual discussion;
4. Improving enrollment management and retention by providing a venue to help recruit and engage highly motivated students in supervised, collaborative research and creative projects.

We have used two means of assessing the effectiveness of the celebration in achieving these goals. Data on participation in COS, as well as enrollments in independent study, indicate substantial and growing student engagement in research and other scholarly activities. A participant survey (developed by a faculty member in education and students in her Educational Assessment class) has provided data on students' perceptions of the contribution of COS to their learning about research in their own, and other disciplines. However, gathering data proved more challenging than we anticipated because it was difficult to get students and faculty members to return the forms. Thus, documenting students' learning as a direct result of participation in the celebration (as distinct from the learning resulting from the class projects or independent studies presented) is more difficult to achieve. A committee is currently refining the COS assessment process and examining ways to gather more direct evidence of student learning.

Engaging the Faculty

Lock Haven University is organized into two colleges. The College of Arts and Sciences offers 53 areas of study; the College of Education and Human Services offers degrees in 11 areas, including graduate studies. If the first Celebration of Scholarship were going to be successful, the committee needed to include as many disciplines and faculty members as possible. We organized the event in two ways. The first focused directly on faculty members' research. Faculty members on our campus engage in their own research and present their efforts at professional meetings across the country. However, very few faculty members are aware of the research interests of colleagues outside their own departments. To address this issue, we wanted the COS to provide faculty members with the opportunity to make jargon-free presentations to the



Josh Miller (a member of the Forensics Club) presents an oral interpretation of the university's literary journal, *The Crucible*.

university community that could be appreciated by those outside the discipline. We organized the presentations under the heading "Provost's Colloquium" and provided two presentation venues—a 90-minute poster session and a series of 15-minute platform presentations. Many of the participants required their upper-level students to attend their presentations, thus celebrating faculty/faculty and faculty/student collaboration.

The second organizational approach focused directly on student-centered scholarship. Historically, most LHU students' independent research projects originated from the science, psychology, social sciences, and English departments. The committee, however, wanted to expand the university's—and our colleagues'—definition of research to include scholarly endeavors in the fine arts, education, interpretative dance, music, creative writing, and other fields. Often faculty members engage students in scholarly efforts as part of classes or independent study, but sometimes only the faculty member sees the result. The committee wanted to celebrate diverse achievements by encouraging—on a single day—public displays of students' efforts through poster sessions, oral presentations, demonstrations, or performances. This was not an easy task.

At first, some believed that their specialization did not lend itself to a day-long celebration of "scholarship." For example, a dance professor wanted to participate in COS with one of her classes but was unsure if research in Civil War dance styles would be deemed an "appropriate scholarly effort." When asked how her students would report findings, she realized that they could choreograph the dances and then present them to the public with a narration.

In another instance, a professor in the business department routinely had teams of students develop advertising campaigns



Sara Suplee discusses her poster presentation on acupuncture. This presentation was part of a requirement for her Health Science Seminar.

as part of one of their class projects. For the COS, students presented their campaigns as posters; and they did so enthusiastically and aggressively to anyone who walked by their stands! This was an excellent educational experience for participants and bystanders alike.

Soon, more and more faculty members became convinced that they and their students would fit under this all-disciplines umbrella of scholarship. Many faculty members were already including a research or creative component in their courses, so they modified the modes of presentation and the timetables to meet the COS format.

If students were going to benefit from COS, they had to have the opportunity to attend events. Faculty members were encouraged to use COS as an alternative to normal classes (for example, connecting assignments to COS events and/or requiring attendance). This proved to be easier said than done, however. Some faculty members resisted participating in the events in any form. They did not cancel classes; indeed, a few faculty members actually scheduled tests on the day and refused to allow students to reschedule the test even if the student was presenting at COS during the class period. Fortunately, these were rare and extreme instances, but they do reflect those faculty members' expression of academic freedom.

Organizing the Program

Prior to the establishment of COS, various groups and departments had showcased students' scholarship throughout the

spring, generally during the last two weeks of the semester. The COS committee felt that these events could provide a basis for the broader event, as well as serve as a catalyst and model for other faculty and student involvement. For example, Phi Kappa Phi sponsored an annual Spring Student Research Symposium; the Social Work program faculty sponsored an annual Social Work Symposium, and each spring a member of the Department of Communication directed student performers in "The *Crucible* Live," an oral interpretation drawn from the student literary and arts journal. These events, along with other similar but smaller student-centered projects—associated with such classes as diverse as Plant Physiology, Psychological Methods, Social Work Methods, and various capstone courses—were all successful, small-scale attempts at engaging students in scholarly activity.

A committee organized the COS program around these existing spring events by consolidating them into one day. We then used these events to entice other departments or individual faculty members to organize similar events. Although—with the exception of the music faculty—entire departments did not offer programs, many individual faculty members did sponsor independent study and class project presentations. For specific examples, please see our COS Web site (www.lhup.edu\smarvel\Celebration\index.htm).

The first COS started with a plenary session at 9:00 a.m., followed by concurrent sessions organized into blocks of time ranging from 90 to 120 minutes. The concurrent sessions generally ended at 5:00 p.m., but some events were scheduled until 10 p.m. Approximately 350 faculty members and students attended the opening plenary session of COS in 2007. In 2008, the plenary session was scheduled at 1:00 p.m. to encourage greater attendance, resulting in more than double the original turnout.

In both years, organizing the printed program and having them ready for distribution on the day of the celebration took a tremendous amount of effort and cooperation from the faculty. We wanted to provide the faculty and students with enough time to finish their projects, but we also had to meet printing deadlines. The program editors were able to give the faculty members and students a submission deadline of three weeks prior to COS; one week later the editors delivered the finished program to the printer. PDF versions of the programs are available for viewing at www.lhup.edu\smarvel\Celebration\index.htm.

Logistical Considerations: A Collaborative Effort

Organizing a campus-wide event such as COS requires a university-wide collaborative effort. At LHU, key people at all levels were motivated, enthusiastic, and supportive. The president, for example, adopted COS as the primary expression of one of his three institutional emphases: engaging students actively in their own learning processes. Sufficient numbers of other administrators, trustees, faculty members, and departmental secretaries shared that vision and made the celebration possible.

Administration. The administration supported the concept of a day-long scholarly event from the outset, and the provost provided all of the funding for our first COS (\$6,000). Some of the larger cost items included purchasing materials to make poster stands, obtaining bus transportation for students from the Clearfield campus, paying printing costs for the 78-page program, and refreshments. Actual construction of the poster stands was handled by theater students. The president of one of our sister schools graciously served *pro bono* as a featured speaker at the plenary session. No compensation was provided to the faculty coordinators in 2007, but the president did host a dinner party for them and the guest speaker the night before the event.

The costs of the celebration in 2008 were considerably higher because the keynote speaker, three faculty members, and a student worker received compensation. We also constructed additional poster stands to accommodate more participants, and printing costs increased as the program grew to 100 pages. Some of these costs were offset by support from the LHU Foundation.

Faculty union. The faculty at Lock Haven is unionized, and any event that affects curriculum or the academic schedule must be approved by the union's Executive Council. Not only did the Executive Council provide overwhelming support for the concept of the project, it agreed to support necessary changes in the spring schedule that allowed us to meet the needs of most faculty members and students. However, the council did indicate that we could not force faculty members to participate (due to academic freedom issues) and that classes could not be cancelled. We could only encourage the faculty to view the day as an alternative learning experience and to embed assignments into their class schedules. In the end, most faculty members responded positively, and they and their students

participated in the day's events. Some faculty members chose not to participate and held regular classes, as we noted earlier. In these cases, the provost's office found replacement rooms for the faculty members whose rooms were scheduled for COS events.

Facilities. The COS planning committee also received tremendous cooperation from the Facilities department. To bolster attendance, both of the Celebrations of Scholarship events were held on Wednesdays. Consequently, there was little time to set up and tear down rooms because many were used the evening prior to COS and were needed early in the morning the day after. But some members of the grounds crews came in early and left later than usual to meet the tight schedules. Indeed, facilities personnel often attended the poster sessions to see what the students were presenting, especially if they knew any students or if their sons or daughters were presenting.

Student government. At times, working with student-government personnel was challenging. Other than gymnasiums, the university has very few large rooms with flexible floor space. The student government, however, controls two large rooms in the Student Union Building, each with more than 1,500 square feet of space. Scheduling student activities in these rooms takes precedence over any other university events, but with the help of the administration and by showing that COS was a student-centered event, an effective compromise was reached for use of the space.

Publicizing the Celebration of Scholarship

Publicity surrounding COS has helped to strengthen an already healthy relationship between LHU and the town of Lock Haven (population 9,149). Although COS received relatively little press coverage from the local and student newspapers the first year, COS garnered much attention from area media in the second year. This publicity has been particularly instrumental in welcoming residents to university cultural events, in promoting the university to area families, and recruiting local students.

We gained publicity in 2008 by working closely with the university's Public Relations Office. Its personnel arranged for the local paper to print six weekly columns leading up to COS. The first five 700-800 word columns were written by faculty members from different disciplines (biology, English, communications, dance, and the Physician Assistant program). These



Dance students in the Department of Performing Arts demonstrate the creation of a modern piece of choreography.

articles addressed the philosophy of scholarship in the disciplinary areas and provided insight into specific scholarly activities of students. In the sixth article, the university's president officially invited the public to COS. Moreover, prior to the columns, the paper ran a two-page feature article, complete with pictures that focused on the student research.

The local paper also published several articles on the 2008 COS keynote speaker, who gave a public poetry reading the evening before COS attended by approximately 200 students and faculty members. Both the keynote speech and the reading were promoted by local libraries and radio stations.

Likewise, campus publications increased publicity for the event in 2008. The student newspaper carried one article prior to COS and an article about the speaker the day of the event. The LHU alumni magazine published an article the summer after each COS (see <http://www.lhup.edu/marketing/perspective/index.htm>).

One of the most ambitious projects in 2008 involved extensive coverage of all the day's events by a journalism professor and her class. Student television journalists interviewed COS committee members, student and faculty participants, the keynote speaker, and attendees. They also recorded portions of various sessions and presentations, resulting in the student-hosted television program "The Celebration of Scholarship Review 2008," which chronicled the day's events and the impact of COS on the university. To view the two episodes (22 and 25 minutes respectively), see http://www.lhup.edu/smarvel/Celebration/2008/Visions_2008.htm.

Funding and Evaluation

In an effort to encourage scholarship, the university president has established a Student Research Fund. The \$500 awards will be available on a competitive basis; students must present at the COS during the year for which they receive funding. This support is a direct result of the success of COS and is the first time such funds have been available directly for students. Grant recipients are strongly encouraged to publish their work in a refereed journal and to present at off-campus conferences.

In the survey conducted to determine how well COS met the goals of the committee, the vast majority of the 326 respondents (>90%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statements indicating heightened awareness of research and scholarly activity at the university. This level of positive response indicates that students felt their experiences at COS were worthwhile and suggests that the event met the majority of established goals. A separate survey was created to determine the participation level of community members, but few forms were returned. We do not know if the low return was due to the unwillingness of visitors to fill out the surveys, or if few community members attended events. In the future, we need a better method to ascertain outside visitors' attendance and their response to COS.

Summary: Learning from Our Experiences

Like many institutions, LHU is undergoing a significant philosophical change in the way faculty members and administrators view the educational process, shifting from focusing on good teaching to focusing on good learning. Were this not the case, its sponsors might not have proposed COS. However, the university was ready—or ready enough—to tip the scales toward creating an event that celebrated the learning process. Three or four years earlier, such an event might not have been possible. The following list summarizes what we learned from two years of publicly celebrating the scholarly efforts of our students and faculty members. It can perhaps serve as a blueprint for others to establish similar events. We learned that:

- A large project does not require complete consensus to be successful. The enthusiasm and skill of key people will suffice, given a generally receptive climate.
- Encouraging faculty members in all disciplines to participate with students—either through independent research or through class projects—led to greater faculty participation,

especially in previously under-represented areas of study. However, we still need to involve more faculty members and students, especially in presenting independent research conducted outside the classroom. We did see an increase in 2008 in the number of students presenting their research at COS; this number correlated to a 20-percent increase in the number of students registering for independent-study credits between the first and second celebrations.

- To an unanticipated degree, faculty members take pride in the scholarly achievements of their students and are willing to try new ways to focus on good teaching and learning. Of course, teachers have always enjoyed the success of their students, but the level of generous pride displayed at the celebrations was startling.
- Having an audience beyond the classroom had a positive effect on the quality of work presented by the students. We had not realized the magnitude of the effect of “going public” on expressions of scholarship and creativity.
- No matter how wise the planning, how enthusiastic the participants, how supportive the administration, a project like COS is more challenging than anyone imagined it would be.

So now the looming questions are: What did the celebrations do for us, and how might a similar event contribute to learning at other institutions? Our experiences gave us a solid basis for pride in our scholarship and our disciplines, empowering both students and faculty members. The events enhanced their motivation to engage in high-quality scholarship, beyond the normal motivation of grades or chits toward promotion or tenure. The celebrations provided opportunities for leadership and teamwork, particularly among younger faculty members, and also provided incentives for accurate and clear communication. But on the larger scale, the events afforded us a new level of institutional self-knowledge and self-efficacy.

Whether causal or simply reflective, the COS helped us clarify changes occurring in our university community, our evolving attitude toward the process of learning, our growing emphasis on students’ engagement in their own learning, our increasing recognition of the quality of our colleagues’ work as teachers and scholars, and our maturing appreciation of intellectual and cultural diversity. Such progress toward self-knowledge was not dramatic, but has grown incrementally each year. For now, Athena remains on Olympus and probably will not visit Lock Haven until we make much more progress; but, in anticipation of her visit, we have reserved a niche for her in our library.

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