From Grass Roots to Ground Swell: Incorporation of a Symposium for Student Scholarship into Institutional Life
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Introduction and methods

Abstract
More than five years after its inception, the annual Student Research Symposium flourishes at a private (Quaker) Midwestern university. Begun by three professors and department chair, the first symposium in 2006 celebrated student scholarship, the endeavor has grown from 13 undergraduate presentations and posters during its first year to 57 posters, an art show, and performing arts/music presentations by undergraduate and graduate students in its fifth year. With increasing faculty and student interest by its third year, the symposium had also garnered administrative support and funding. Student data indicates that student participants’ reactions have been positive. Recognizing the added value of student scholarship as a pedagogical tool, a considerable number of faculty have begun integrating symposium participation into their courses (i.e., contingent upon a student’s proposal acceptance). Growing benefits of the symposium include encouraging scholarship, fostering crosswalk between disciplines about various methods of inquiry and expression, and fostering experiential learning. Initially a grass roots effort, the symposium now is a flourishing forum for myriad types of scholarship across disciplines as diverse as the visual and performing arts, the natural and social sciences, and business, education, and the health professions. Serving as a showcase for student scholarship, the symposium promotes integration of student work and faculty mentoring across the curriculum.

Keywords: student scholarship, undergraduate symposia, higher education research

Background
Malone University is a private, non-profit institution that is affiliated with the Evangelical Friends Church—Eastern Region. The Friends (Quaker) tradition honors priorities of simplicity, equality, peace, and many other themes and transcendence (Barboza & Brox, 1983; Dandelion, 2008). After the mid-1600s, Friends also became more open to differing theological traditions (e.g., liturgical denominations; Dandelion, 2008). In addition, Friends traditions emphasize personal education (Hamrin, 2003). Malone institutional history is consistent with the foregoing principles, as its current mission. Many disciplines, professions, and theological traditions are represented among Malone faculty, staff, and students (Malone University Facebook, 2012). Thus, when an academic program chair and department chair came together in 2008 in a grass roots effort to honor the scholarship of our undergraduate students, it made sense that the resulting effort would be inclusive—celebrating paradigms, orientations, and knowledge domains from the sciences, humanities, arts, and professions.

A Trans-disciplinary Approach
Via the current analysis—which is trans-disciplinary and multi-method—we acknowledge the broad and inclusive approach to student scholarship found in the Malone University Student Research Symposium. Trans-disciplinary research is lauded as progressive, inclusive, and multi-method. All fields are welcomed, and their methods are too. Even more than multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary endeavors, trans-disciplinary ones are mutually influential and directed by research problems rather than domains of knowledge (Leavy, 2011). Members of research teams come together to solve problems with mutual respect for their differing methodologies and epistemologies. In traditional science (like chemistry, biology, physics, psychology, and related social sciences), collaborations are aimed at discerning absolute truth, and it is generally accepted that scientific activities—whether collecting qualitative or quantitative data—will progress human knowledge toward that truth (Popper, 1961). In disciplines that stress an action research orientation (like education, business, the arts, and some social sciences), authenticity is prized and there is a recognition that individuals’ perspectives might lead them to varying understandings of the same situation (Bradbury-Huang, 2013; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). A trans-disciplinary approach can bring together scholars across fields, from both traditional and action-research orientations, to explore the world and build new knowledge. Given Malone University’s background, a trans-disciplinary approach to the Student Research Symposium makes sense, and the founding members of the event planning committee have emphasized that the event is open to all approaches to scholarship. Thus, we observe the following mixed foundational principles in Malone University’s symposium.

Our research about the effectiveness of our Student Research Symposium involves:
1) An Action Research Orientation in our event planning—year-to-year (Figure 1; Table 1); and
2) Traditional Research (gathering both quantitative and qualitative data) in surveys of student participants and faculty (Table 1; hand-out).

three studies and analyses

Analysis #1: Action Orientation in Event Planning
Among symposium strengths identified in event planner debriefings and survey data (as below) was increasing participation—in absolute numbers of student presenters and with respect to faculty/departments commitments. Praise also includes affinity for diverse fields represented in the event, having performances; adding graduate students (2013); efforts to coordinate the event with other similar activities (e.g., Staff & Faculty Excellence Chapal; Malone Undergraduate Research Symposium: A Festival of Student Achievement). Held on an afternoon during Spring Semesters, 2009, the first MUURSAFOSA was open to undergraduates, and they had options to submit a presentation, poster, or performance (e.g., creative writing readings). Through a process involving planning meetings, open and collaborative dialogue, and democratic decision-making, the event builders were able to receive submissions, vet them, and construct the program for planning and presenting, acting, and evaluating; the event team worked from year-to-year in order to improve the symposium. In all years, except one, event planners also met after the symposium in order to debrief about the challenges and successes during that year. Figure 1 illustrates the highly collaborative and cyclical processes associated with symposium planning, action, and evaluation. Table 1 displays relative similarities and differences in the symposium across five years.

Analysis #2: Student Participant Surveys
Student participants were invited to complete the survey near the close of each year’s symposium in 2011, 2012, and 2013. Our anonymous questionnaire is four open-ended queries, and our method of analysis is qualitative. The open-ended responses were transcribed and summarized by the first author (DC in 2011 & 2012) or by the fourth author’s administrative assistant (in 2013). When responses were transcribed a bullet list of all respondents’ remarks was constructed. Afterward, transcriptions were submitted to narrative analysis (e.g., Gee, 1991, 1991). The goal was to use repetitive readings to uncover the fundamental narrative units in response to each survey item. Overall, responses were positive. One key issue is that responders across years wanted additional assistance with preparation of posters and talking points to refer to our hand-out for a table of data.

Analysis #3: Faculty Survey Data
Malone University currently has 112 full-time faculty (59 female) and 134 (74 female) part-time faculty. Of those faculty, 36 responded to our query to complete the questionnaire. Among survey respondents, only 3 were part-time (representing 2.1% of FT faculty), and 33 were full-time (representing 29.46% of FT faculty). So, the sampling was 2:1 for FT to faculty. Twenty-five (62%) of the 40 faculty were female and 13 (36.1%) were male. The key finding along the survey data is that faculty were significantly more likely to report a plan to include the Student Research Symposium in their current/upcoming courses than they were to report having integrated it into previous courses. t(55) = -3.06, p < .01 (two-tailed). In keeping with our key hypothesis, the result is consistent with growing interest in the symposium—especially among full-time faculty. See our hand-out for additional information.

General Discussion
A trans-disciplinary, multi-method approach to event planning, data collection, and evaluation leads us to conclude that the Malone University Student Research Symposium has evolved from a grass roots effort by two faculty into a campus-wide event. Action research and traditional, positivist methodologies converge to indicate that the event is increasing in popularity and in the extent to which faculty include it as an activity in their courses. Our move to larger venues, to Saturday, and to include graduate students has been well-received. Challenges are buy-in by part-time, degree-completion, business, and education faculty; tension between traditional science and various other forms of scholarship (e.g., visual/performance methods in the arts, narrative traditions in the humanities); and whether to broaden the event beyond Malone University to other regional campuses and to the Greater Canton Area of Stark County, Ohio. Overall, we look forward to continuing success of the Malone University Student Research Symposium.

Additional information and references are available in our hand-out.