Course-based exhibitions: Serendipity in the physical and digital spaces of academic libraries

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Abstract

Library exhibition practices vary significantly between institutions, depending on expertise, resources, and goals of the individual library. The University Libraries at Virginia Tech have supported and developed two exhibition programs within the past six years, both with a focus on showcasing products and processes from classes around campus, rather than library materials and artifacts. While such work is unique, it can provide valuable experiences both for the contributors and creators of these exhibitions, as well as those who see and interact with them. In this article, we discuss the history and origins of these programs, the Course Exhibit Initiative and the Active Learning Curation Program, how they work, and the outcomes they strive to achieve. We discuss the workflows that we take to showcase the work of our contributors, and demonstrate how these programs share some outcomes with exhibit programs based in special collections, but have their own unique challenges and opportunities. Finally, we make the case that the output of these two exhibit programs provides a new experience of serendipity in libraries.

Keywords: academic libraries, serendipity, exhibitions, learning spaces, collaboration

Introduction

The University Libraries at Virginia Tech have undergone rapid change in the past six years. As the demands for research, education, and community support have shifted in the 21st century, academic libraries have adjusted their services to meet the needs of patrons. At Virginia Tech, many books have been moved to remote storage, allowing for more public workspaces, including reservable group study rooms and an open commons area. Some smaller spaces were renovated to give patrons access to new and emerging technologies, which were named the Studios Network. Technology lending became a priority as patrons required laptops, cameras, audio recorders, and tablets to complete schoolwork and research. With each renovation and addition to our services, the library maintained its status as a space that provided resources to support research and education, but the environment changed as more people had space to work and collaborate within the building.

Among these changes was the addition of two new exhibit programs aimed at documenting, displaying, and conveying material from courses taught at Virginia Tech to audiences outside the classroom. While these programs have some commonalities with exhibit programs based in special collections, by focusing on content from courses occurring on campus and bringing the exhibits to spaces in the library where such content might be unexpected, the outcomes from these programs can be quite different. This article will describe each exhibit program and explore some of the opportunities and challenges of creating exhibits based on course content, both in physical library spaces as well as online. In doing so, we argue that exhibits can provide an alternative or complementary experience of serendipity to that of browsing the stacks.

The Course Exhibit Initiative

History and Background

The Course Exhibit Initiative (CEI) was inspired by a one-time project at the Georgia Tech Libraries created by an English Composition class in the fall of 2007, titled *A History of the Mad Housers* (2007). The students were researching homelessness in Atlanta, Georgia and wanted to present their final project not as a paper or presentation but instead by building a small structure used by the homeless in the library commons. This was inspiring for Brian Mathews who was at the Georgia Tech libraries at the time. He kept this project in mind and when he became associate dean at the Virginia Tech libraries he found the library environment ripe for this type of experimental expression of student scholarship. He started the CEI with Scott Fralin to engage the Virginia Tech community through exhibits in the library based on the work students were creating in classrooms all over campus.

The idea of showcasing student work through exhibits, while very common, expected, and enjoyed in the Virginia Tech Libraries now, was radical and risky when the CEI began. In the beginning many questions were on our minds: What if we took student works out of the classroom and shared them with the community? What if more people than just professors saw student assignments? What would happen if we offered space in the library to students and instructors, where they could show off their class work however they liked? Would they take us

up on this offer? Would they work with us to create a library exhibit? Mathews' experience at Georgia Tech made him think that the Virginia Tech campus community might respond positively to these questions, so we found a class for the first of what would become many exhibits created by the Virginia Tech Libraries.

The first exhibit created by the CEI was pulled from a Religion in America class in the fall of 2013 and it was on display for one week. The students were tasked with examining different religious practices throughout America and interpreting them through various mediums. We worked with the class to share the works they created, including digital presentations, religious artifacts, posters, and other paper content. We also helped create and distribute promotional materials for the exhibit. In many ways this was the blueprint from which all subsequent exhibits were created.

From this project, the CEI grew to its current state which supports multiple, concurrent, months-long installations, as well as hosting and creating traveling exhibits. We now create up to 16 exhibits per year. The approach, techniques, and expertise have grown with the program, but the intentions are still the same: to take student work outside of the classroom to share it with the local and campus community, and to create meaningful and unexpected experiences for visitors to the Virginia Tech Libraries. The program has expanded to include exhibits on topics brought forth by researchers and interdisciplinary teams made up of faculty, staff, and students, as well as commemorative and heritage month celebrations.

Exhibit Production

Each exhibit created with CEI has its own unique workflow and process but all exhibits begin with a conversation to set the expectations for the library and the collaborator, create a project timeline, and fill out a brief for the exhibit. The brief is very important because it is the document from which many decisions about the exhibit will be made. We write down how the collaborator wants the exhibit to feel, what they want visitors to it to learn, any outcomes they want to achieve, the colors and fonts to use, the type of artifacts to be displayed, and other information that will become helpful once we begin working on the design.

The exhibits we create fall into one of three categories based on their complexity and time investment. The first level of exhibits are the biggest, involving bespoke structures tailored to the content being exhibited. These immersive exhibits are true collaborative projects that require the involvement of the faculty and students being exhibited. In some cases the faculty will have a clear idea of what they want out of the exhibit at the beginning of the project. They know exactly what assignment will be exhibited, the deadlines for it, and how they want the exhibit to look and feel. If the exhibit planning process begins before the class starts meeting it works well because it gives us the chance to embed ourselves in the class and advise the students on their work before their deadlines. In this situation we can encourage them to think about preparing their work for a public audience and the aspects they may want to consider such as voice, word choice, and design, depending on what they are creating. The timeline for exhibits that receive in-depth treatments such as this like this ranges from six to twelve months.

A great example of this level of exhibit is *Hip Hop @ VT* from the fall of 2018. It was based on student works from a *Foundations of Hip Hop* course as well as co-curricular activities related to hip hop in our community. Planning began nine months prior to the opening. The

exhibit covered about 600 square feet, required archival and community research, and we commissioned an aerosol artist to create a graffiti style mural as the focal point of the exhibit.

The second level of exhibits are effectively miniature versions of the immersive exhibits. These are simpler and more condensed to fit into smaller spaces in the library. These are the most common type of exhibit we create. In these cases, the faculty and class know what will be exhibited but they leave the rest up to the library to decide. The faculty and students are much more hands off in these situations and are more interested in the completion of the finished product than having input on all of the details that go into it. Exhibit collaborations that work in this way are often started after the class has already begun and are created on a much shorter timeline than other projects. A timeline on an exhibit of this nature might range from 2 - 6 months. In the fall of 2018 we worked with several study abroad programs to create an exhibit at this level. *Living and Learning Abroad* was created by sending a survey to students who participated in one of twelve study abroad programs. We then took their survey responses along with photos they submitted to create a single poster for each program that shared the experience of the students who participated. These posters were then hung in an exhibit space measuring about 175 square feet. From start to finish it took about four months to complete this exhibit.

The third level of exhibits are gallery walls or other flat installations. These exhibits hang on walls fitted with hanging systems and give us the opportunity to quickly and easily create exhibits with flat content. Inevitably there are classes that want to display their work at the last minute. In these cases they might be finishing the semester and they would like to have their work on display for the final class meeting. These exhibits are ideal for last-minute ideas and requests brought to us by patrons. The installation is similar from exhibit to exhibit, so planning for layouts and construction is limited, and the final products fill in gaps in our exhibition schedules due to the lengthy process of creating larger exhibitions.The timeline for an exhibit of this nature might be as short as two weeks. In the spring of 2019 we were approached by a graduate student who was completing her master's thesis in history. For the public presentation of her thesis research she wanted to do an exhibit in the library so we worked with her to create 16 posters which were an interpretation of her research. These posters were then displayed on a mobile gallery setup that can fit in an area as small as 100 square feet. We worked together for about one month prior to completing the exhibit.

Our design process for creating exhibits borrows from many disciplines including interior design, set design, building construction, and exhibition design. After completing the brief we create a framework of colors, fonts, and styles to work from and begin to do rough sketches of the space layout as well as the layout of the content in the exhibit space. As the ideas progress we move on to more detailed drawings using the SketchUp software package. Depending on the exhibit, we may also create a to-scale low-fidelity mockup of the exhibit using cardboard or foam board. This provides a different, and very useful, perspective on the exhibit design that is hard to achieve through a digital mockup.

Once the design is mostly settled, we then move to testing structures and systems for the exhibit if need be. Some exhibits require testing of this sort to make sure they will meet our expectations for how they should look, as well as be safe. Our exhibits are almost always in un-monitored spaces that are open to the public at all hours so the safety and security of the

materials being shown, as well as that of the visitors to the exhibit, is paramount. Due to the small size of our program we often have to fabricate our own exhibition systems rather than buying them premade, so testing for safety is very important.

After everything has been tested to make sure it is viable, we begin production of all the exhibit materials and structures. This might range from reproductions of archival materials, to student-created visual works, to physical artifacts, videos, sound compositions, and decorative materials for the exhibit structure. We create nearly all of these materials in-house. Posters and placards are designed and mounted to boards in-house, as are the vinyl graphics we integrate into our exhibition design. Some specialty materials such as custom-printed adhesive wall coverings are ordered from other vendors as we do not have the capability to create these ourselves.

Unlike many other exhibition programs, we have no spaces designated for exhibits that resemble a traditional exhibition or gallery space. While this requires more work for each exhibition, it also means that every class we exhibit gets a boutique treatment. No two exhibits are the same because no two classes are the same. This also means that when designing we have some physical constraints that must be kept in mind. Many of our exhibit locations are only accessible via standard size doorways so all materials and structures must either fit through those doors or be assembled on site. Our structures and materials must also fit within elevators and comply with lower ceiling heights in some parts of the building.

While the realities of our space are occasionally a challenge, they do allow us the freedom to find spaces in the library that suit the needs of each exhibit. They also afford us the opportunity to intentionally design some serendipitous opportunities as described by Lennart Björneborn in the “Dimensions affecting serendipity” section of his study (2008). Outside of planned events held at our exhibits, all of the interactions come from incidental encounters. We design and place our exhibits to entice people to engage with them who might never explore them otherwise. Every exhibit we build is available at all times that the library is open, and they are typically placed in areas adjacent to patron seating and never in closed rooms. We label them well and work to make sure they visually complement the spaces they inhabit while still contrasting enough to be noticable. The range of topics covered by our exhibits is very wide and do not choose locations based on similar topics near the exhibit spaces so there is often a difference in subject between the nearest stacks and the exhibit content. These practices to encourage serendipitous encounters with our exhibits which we have developed organically are described as successful by Björneborn’s study (2008).

Exhibit Outcomes

The Course Exhibit Initiative has three main outcomes that we focus on achieving. First, we educate library visitors about the class or project presented in a clear, concise, and accessible way. We do this by taking the time to consider how to best present the exhibit materials so they can be understood by everyone who visits the library. Our visitors include faculty, staff, students, and community members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences with a variety of abilities, so the messaging has to be clear and the layouts intuitive and easy to follow. As we design for accessibility and inclusivity we naturally implement many of the

strategies Björneborn described as successful in stimulating serendipitous activities such as diverse topics, appropriate signage, and unhampered access (2008).

Second, we create new learning opportunities for students who create exhibits. We achieve this in several ways. First is by sharing their work outside of the typical classroom setting and requiring them to create for public consumption, not only for their professor. All too often the work done in classrooms that is only seen by professors and peers in that course. Putting student work in an exhibit requires them to consider how to best present their work to a public audience that is going to include people who have no knowledge of the topic on display. This means the students need to carefully consider word choice, the use of figures and diagrams which might be confusing, and many other considerations. When creating exhibits we do create didactic panels but we don't alter the students' work, nor do we have time, so it is important that the students consider how to best present their work to the public themselves.

A less often experienced but just as valuable learning opportunity for students is that of exhibit designer. In one specific case, the CEI has repeatedly worked with a faculty member who teaches graduate level courses in public history. On those projects students in the class are assigned roles related to the exhibition design process such as researcher, exhibit designer, or digital content manager. While it is challenging to create an exhibit with a student team taking on these roles, it is a great experience for the students involved. Many of them are hoping to get jobs in cultural institutions such as museums, art galleries, and libraries. By working within the exhibit design process in the CEI, they get the experience of having to create a large-scale, tangible deliverable with a deadline. They also get to experience first-hand some of the challenges associated with creating an exhibit for public consumption. Dealing with issues of voice, vocabulary, and narrative is something these students are familiar with, but not in this context. There are not often other opportunities to gain this kind of experience in academia and the students value it very much.

In addition to the students who design exhibits through a class the CEI also employs students to help with exhibit design on a regular basis. These students might work with us for multiple years and they get a very wide set of experiences in that time. They see and experience all parts of the exhibit creation process from brainstorming and sketching to fabrication and installation. Throughout this process they learn many skills, such as how to use some common tools, digital design techniques, printing and creating large scale posters, and unique processes specific to their exhibition.

Finally, we provide instructors the opportunity to safely experiment with course design and new projects, while showing off their successes. Our exhibits are a unique opportunity to share the content of a course with a wide audience and a large number of people. Exhibit spaces have between 50 and 300 passersby per hour during peak library hours so there is the potential for thousands of people to see the content on display over the course of several weeks. Many instructors love this exposure and are excited to share their course content. Others see it as an opportunity to increase the enrollment, and all the faculty we have worked with love that the work their students are doing is exposed to such a large audience.

Active Learning Curation Program

History and Background

The Active Learning Curation Program's (ALCP) conception was the result of unique circumstances and initiatives at Virginia Tech in 2017. The Learning division of the library had a vested interested in the New Classroom Building that had been constructed in 2016, as the soft spaces had furniture that had been supplied by VT's university libraries. Because of this arrangement, Brian Mathews, associate dean of the learning division had been proposing and investigating ways in which to embed a librarian in that space at some level. Simultaneously, the Moss Arts Center was interested in hiring someone to manage the VT Art Collection, and from these two needs, the Active Learning Curation Program was conceptualized and created.

The goals for the ALCP were broad by design. In an interview with Mathews, he emphasized that his goal in creating positions like these was to bring individuals to the Learning Environments team with a diverse set of skills and expertise, and to allow each person to shape their services in ways that made use of their strengths (November 12, 2018). The main goals were to have a library faculty member with a vested interest in the New Classroom Building, and to expand on the Course Exhibit Initiative. The focus on the concept of active learning was specific to the New Classroom Building; its classrooms feature furniture and technology designed to give instructors the opportunity to make classes more active in a broad sense. Activities could include student presentations, group work, digital poster sessions, or simply increased interactivity during a more lecture-style presentation. By showcasing the features of the building that supported students' active engagement in their classroom activities, the ALCP could help new instructors understand the purpose of the space and how to effectively use it.

Much like the Course Exhibit Initiative, the ALCP has been shaped by its founding manager and the spaces that exhibitions inhabit. Classroom documentation can be conducted in a number of ways, and while we do experiment with new methodologies, Alice Rogers' experience in ethnography has led us to focus on qualitative documentation: interviews, descriptions of classroom experiences, photos, and videos. These methods also are inherently more visual and aural, which is useful when using the artifacts in the exhibitions themselves. Rogers also had experience with digital media production, which shaped the formats exhibitions take as the program grows and expands.

Using digital platforms is also made necessary by the shape and size of the physical space in NCB. While Newman Library has a number of empty or underutilized spaces due to frequent renovations and changes to space functionality, NCB's recent construction and limited public space creates a challenge for physical exhibits. Many of the walls are fully made of glass, looking out over campus or into classrooms, creating a more open feeling in the building but leaving limited space for installing wall-mounted exhibitions. Similarly, there is little floorspace in the public areas that would support heavy traffic flow between classes in addition to a freestanding exhibition. Because of these physical characteristics, use of digital components became necessary to exhibit the learning practices happening in the building.

Learning Documentation

Documenting active learning in New Classroom Building is a variable process, but there are a number of constants that guide our practices. While our goal is to highlight successful learning experiences, we also want to be honest to the experiences of instructors and students in the classroom, and note challenges and problems that occurred throughout the class. Even if not all of these are exhibited, we can share our observations back with the instructors with whom we worked, and they then have the opportunity to adapt their course content and teaching style if necessary. Another major consideration is student privacy. The exhibits we produce would not constitute research as defined by the Institutional Review Board, but we still work to maintain student privacy and receive explicit permission to use student likenesses in exhibitions. This limits the number of photographs and videos that can be taken in classroom settings, but we use creative approaches to documenting these classroom experiences, using photographs as reference for drawings, blurring over identifiable features of students, or sketching and mapping classrooms in lieu of photography.

The process of documenting a classroom typically begins when we are contacted by an instructor interested in being part of the ALCP. We then go to a preliminary class session to determine some parameters for the project: what in the class might be most interesting to document, and thus how many sessions will be observed. Class observation will result in extensive notes, sketches, and occasionally photographs or videos of the sessions. These times also act as an opportunity to build rapport with both the instructors and students of the class, which is important for effectively communicating their stories. If students have an opportunity to talk to exhibition designers, they are able to understand our goals, and feel more comfortable being honest about their experiences. Also, because we see the students' experiences firsthand, we are able to reference specifics during interviews, and also pick up on key moments worthy of discussion and presentation.

Interviews are key elements of the documentation process. These act as content for audio-based exhibitions, but also as ways to bring in student and instructor voices more directly. While a lot can be learned about a class through observation, the thoughts of students and instructors during a class session are often not apparent. Students are endeavoring to impress their instructors and present knowledge during class time, and instructors are focused on the learning of their students. The interviews are set up to be reflections on the time spent in the classroom, and so students can evaluate what was helpful, their reactions to certain activities or assignments, and instructors can discuss why they used particular methods, and how they felt activities went.

Exhibit Planning

Planning for these types of exhibitions mimic many of the curatorial processes that are used in special collections for creating exhibits with an assemblage of materials. Some planning occurs at the beginning of the documentation process, which allows observers and interviewers to focus on key elements that are going to be central to the final exhibition. Some detailed planning for the final exhibition can happen throughout the observation process, where quotes from interviews and notes from particular sessions are earmarked for inclusion in the final exhibition. More typically, we wait until the observation is complete to begin fully compiling the

content for presentation. Interviews are transcribed, notes are compiled into a single document, and images are selected and edited.

An important call for the ALCP is to create narratives around the learning process through these exhibitions. The goal is not to create learning objects that teach instructors how to incorporate active learning into their classroom, but rather to celebrate the work of students and instructors that have engaged in new and often challenging pedagogical practices. To this end, we work to create narrative structure to the exhibitions, inserting our own voices as necessary to provide background information on the spaces and technologies used by users of the New Classroom Building, and also to share notes from observation and paraphrase interviews when privacy is a concern. Inserting our own voices also creates a greater conversation between the specific class being documented, and past classes that have been highlighted as part of the ALCP. This process ultimately results in a plan that centers the innovative and unique classroom practices used by instructors and students, and creates content that has the potential to engage a wider audience.

Exhibit Design

Exhibits made for digital platforms that exist in physical spaces resemble physical exhibits more closely that online digital exhibitions. They are seen by passersby in hallways, and contribute to the aesthetics of public spaces on campus. Digital displays also have a number of constraints that create unique opportunities and challenges for their exhibition design. Because the screens are often also used for announcements and other events, something more narrative can seem out of place. This can be beneficial in some ways, causing patrons to stop and look at something that does not match the rest of the slides. In other ways, it provides an impetus for finding ways to explain why the slide exists in this space, either through additional documentation in the building (i.e. a poster explaining the slides), a consistent presence on the digital displays with rotating content, or messages and images on the displays themselves that make their presence meaningful. Further complicating the content of the digital displays is the rate at which they rotate. Typically, the screens change slides every fifteen seconds, which only allows for a very short amount of text to be read and understood. Additional information about the class and exhibition as a whole cannot be included. Patrons also spend minimal time looking at digital displays, and so each individual slide needs to stand on its own, and not depend on those before and after. These parameters greatly limit the textual information that can be on a digital display, and require that visual information, with pictures, diagrams, and illustration play a greater role in conveying information.

Online platforms provide their own challenges and opportunities. While they do not have the inherent audience of exhibitions placed in physical spaces, they provide access to the exhibit to a potentially worldwide audience. However, getting audience members to that exhibit can be a challenge. For that reason, we have often chosen to work within existing media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. While these cannot be considered archival-level locations for the preservation of the exhibit's content, they provide discoverability at a level that is far greater than a standalone website. Because the ALCP is a new program at Virginia Tech and not likely to have patrons looking specifically for its content, the ability for users to

serendipitously come across these exhibits is crucial for their success. YouTube and Instagram include a majority of the features described by Tammera Race that support serendipity: easy access, browsing support, suggestions, the use of tagging and metadata, user-input, and visual representation of search results (2012: 145).

Roles of Exhibits in Library Spaces

To make CEI and ALCP work and continue to create exhibits, we have to fill many roles. At the Virginia Tech Libraries all of the following roles are filled by one full-time faculty member per exhibit program with the assistance of student workers and other library departments as described.

One of the first and most central roles to our work is to be a project manager for the exhibits; we act as a catalyst for each stage of the exhibition creation process. Faculty members will approach us to express that they are interested in an exhibit, but do not know where to start. When this happens we work with them, performing a reference interview of sorts, to determine exactly what it is they want out of an exhibit, how they want it to look and feel, when they want it, and how we can make it happen. In this way we help them interpret and evaluate the work they want to present and determine the best way to present that work. After setting these expectations, we are the ones who keep the exhibit on time by scheduling and holding meetings as well as setting the timeline, ordering supplies, coordinating with contractors and vendors as necessary, and many other countless tasks.

We also act as exhibition designers for our programs. For us this means being the designer of the physical space the exhibit will reside in, graphic designer for all materials in the exhibit, sound and video designer if those are elements to be included in the particular exhibit, structural engineer, and physical wall/panel designer. Once the project is set in motion and it has reached the appropriate stage we then becomes the builder, taking the steps necessary to physically create the exhibit as designed. The methods and processes we use have evolved over time from building walls to creating reusable stage flats inspired by theatre design to using large scale alternative materials such as gator board and large corrugated cardboard sheets, along with a variety of objects for displaying digital content: tablets, screens, computers, and VR headsets have all been incorporated into exhibitions.

While we do not create the artifacts for these exhibitions, our jobs do include some content creation and curatorial efforts. We handle all of the appropriate writing and copy editing that goes along with sharing and explaining researched materials. Contributing students and professors do provide written materials such as introductory essays and artist statements, which we then edit for clarity, length, and grammar. In some cases exhibits require research and discovery beyond what is given to the library by the faculty and student partners, and in that case the library also takes on the role of researcher. This is often the case when we create exhibits designed to celebrate heritage months or commemorative observations. For such exhibits, we do additional research in the archives or reach out to community organizations to conduct interviews.

Prior to the completion of the exhibit we work with the library's communications team to promote the exhibit and opening reception. The communications team helps us do this by

sharing information via social media, university calendars, and the university news system. For opening receptions we rely heavily on our student services team who does custom catering in-house. By having this team in our library we have much better receptions, and it frees up the exhibits team to spend more time focusing on the exhibit directly. Finally, once the exhibit is complete a record of it is created in our institutional repository, VTechWorks.[1] This record includes pertinent information about the exhibit including collaborators, photos, and exhibit design source files if we have the proper permissions to share them.

Serendipity

Serendipity in the stacks is a concept often discussed both at Virginia Tech Library and within greater library scholarship. In the past decade, a large portion of Virginia Tech's collections have moved to an off-site storage facility, making room for more people to use the library as study and work space, and allowing for new programs and spaces to develop. As information workers, we were aware of this process happening at other institutions, and that there were a number of strong reactions both within our own library and within the information science field. Serendipitous discovery is valued by many scholars and library professionals, as it is seen as necessary or inherent to the research process (Hoeflich, 2007). Many patrons expect to have serendipitous discovery as part of their research process, and researchers have explored how they adapt their information-seeking strategies to ensure that they find unexpected content or materials (Foster and Ford, 2003).

As new avenues of information-seeking have developed, libraries have explored ways to facilitate serendipity, particularly in response to changing library environments. Solutions have been investigated using text messaging to mobile devices (Kefalidou and Sharples 2016), web-based discovery tools (Cooksey, 2004; Race, 2012), and modifications to physical space (Björneborn, 2008). We see our exhibits filling this role as well, and their contribution to serendipitous discovery is something we consider when designing, constructing, and disseminating our exhibitions. We consider whether exhibitions have seats nearby, what entrances or exits may be near an exhibit, and count the number of passersby who frequent various sites for exhibitions. Exhibitions in library spaces, regardless of their content, provide moments of serendipitous discovery as patrons come seeking specific information or a place to study, meet, or create, and exhibits can act as interludes to those processes.

Serendipity in the stacks and its importance have also been critiqued by a number of information professionals, and these criticisms are considerations we have for our exhibitions. One such critique is that the intention of patrons is not aligned with their outcome, even if such an event is viewed in a positive light (Carr, 2015). In the case of exhibits, most patrons have found what they were seeking in the library already, which would typically include computers, places to sit, or specific spaces. We also are controlling what patrons discover, as we control the content of exhibitions, a strategy reminiscent of Carr's suggestion to allow users to perceive serendipity, while intentionally creating these moments (2015: 838). Carr also questions whether resources spent facilitating serendipity could better serve patrons if they were spent elsewhere (2015: 838). For course-based exhibitions, many take up relatively small spaces, and the costs for materials such as posterboard, simple hanging or framing systems, paper, and

printing are relatively minimal. Even for a large exhibition, the space taken up would only be that of a few tables.

Exhibitions also serve a much wider audience than a given section of stacks, making them a much more efficient investment for facilitating serendipity. Research-based serendipity is at its best when the patron finds materials that are relevant to their field of study, but serendipitous discovery within our exhibits is perhaps most effective when the patron knows little or nothing about the content of the installation. Rather than providing material crucial to an established research project, exhibitions are opportunities for patrons to explore areas of study that they do not pursue. Students can learn about classes outside of their major and core curriculum, and perhaps discover a secondary area of interest they would be interested in pursuing. Community members can see what work students and faculty members are undertaking at Virginia Tech in language and mediums meant to engage all audiences, not limited to specialists. Physical space provides these opportunities for intersection between people from all walks of life, and while the outcomes may be less drastic than coming across a crucial piece of literature for a research project, they are still meaningful and can help foster community bonds across the patrons of the library.

Digital exhibitions can act in a similar manner. Some digital exhibitions exist in physical spaces, such as on digital displays or interactive screens. These support serendipity in many of the ways previously described, although the audiences can be a bit different. When using digital displays that are also used for building announcements, the discovery of something other than basic information is perhaps the most serendipitous, as patrons expect one thing and receive another. This is in contrast with most of the physical exhibitions in Newman Library, which are typically installed in consistent locations. In many ways, there's an impetus here to make digital display exhibitions useful to patrons of the space, because the expectation is set that the content will have that use.

In contrast, online exhibitions make use of serendipity quite a bit, because they are typically discovered through search engines and platforms that aggregate content. We use tagging systems on various hosting platforms to make our online content as discoverable as possible, and this creates some of the serendipitous discovery that would be expected of our physical exhibitions. While browsing videos, pictures, and audio with a certain tag, users are not often expecting content from universities to be presented on online platforms, but they encounter and learn from these unusual exhibitions.

Other Outcomes

Beyond serendipitous discovery, the exhibit programs described here help beautify our physical spaces and increase the number of departments who collaborate with the library. When creating both physical and digital exhibits we carefully consider how they are designed to make sure they improve the spaces they go in rather than detract from them. We design with our library and university brand kits in mind so we stay with approved colors and fonts so the exhibits feel like they belong in our spaces. While we do want people to notice the exhibits we also want them to be in harmony with our existing spaces. The added consistency achieved by adhering to established brand styles helps make the exhibits appear more professional and

therefore give visitors the perception that the exhibits on display are part of one program rather than disparate projects.

Another important consideration, especially when creating physical exhibits, is that of location. While we do have a codified set of exhibit spaces we still spend lots of time considering how to arrange exhibits within them to make sure they are safe, accessible, designed in a way that doesn't block other library services or exits, and of an appropriate scale. All of these decisions are important and when considered carefully they ensure that the physical exhibits we install are aesthetically pleasing and improve the look of our library.

One other additional outcome of our exhibit programs is that they are a great way to increase the number of departments the library partners with across campus. As of this writing we have worked with over 70 partners on the Virginia Tech campus to create exhibits. These 70 partners represent over 50 different departments on the Virginia Tech campus. While many of our repeat partners are in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, a very natural partners for libraries, we have also worked with departments from each of the Virginia Tech's other academic colleges as well as many institutes on campus and other non-academic departments.

Increasing the number of departments the library partners with is an important outcome for a few reasons. First of all we are on a very large campus with over 30,000 students so it is hard to promote our services and activities effectively. As we increase the variety of departments we are connected to we can then make sure those departments are aware of the services the library offers to them. This helps the departments connect their students with the resources they need to be successful and it helps the library promote and increase the number of users of our services. Second, much of the recruitment for our exhibit programs is done by word of mouth. And so if we are able to work with a wide variety of departments they will talk about their experience to other departments in their network and continue to increase the awareness of the exhibit programs on our campus.

While we have many similarities to special collections exhibit programs, there are notable differences that are visible in the final products. Our focus is on process, not artifacts. While both special collections exhibit programs and our own endeavor to educate people who visit the library, the remainder of the desired outcomes for our exhibit programs focus heavily on the people behind material submitted rather than the materials themselves. In special collections and archives, improving access to the materials is paramount to the success of an exhibition, whereas with our programs, we are more interested in sharing the process students took to create their class assignments rather than the end result. The same goes for faculty experimentation in courses. We aim to share the process, method, and pedagogy behind the class, not just the final products. We want to elevate the students and faculty in the courses featured in exhibits more so than the work they have done.

Conclusion

The Course Exhibit Initiative and Active Learning Curation Program were created so that the library could create partnerships with instructors and students around campus, and showcase their work and classroom experiences. We endeavor to use effective workflows and

strategies to make a variety of exhibits with different materials, content, and scales. While we do not have many resources, our impact is significant: thousands of people encounter our exhibitions each year, and they shape the spaces in which they reside. We think these programs and the roles we play in exhibition creation could be useful to other information professionals looking to shape their library spaces: both as they transition, and also to help create moments of serendipity in new spaces. Installing public presentations of academic work supports the university as a whole and provides new learning experiences for everyone involved. All of these elements benefit the library and help to create beauty and serendipity in library spaces: places where people come to work, collaborate, and learn.

Notes

[1] Our VTechWorks repository can be found at https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/85649.

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Biographies

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