Wanted: Art! Conducting a Campus-Wide Art Competition

Traditional academic art librarian outreach duties involve working with faculty on matters related to library acquisitions and instruction sessions, and communicating with students through reference interactions, social media, and attendance at campus art-related functions. Occasionally, unexpected opportunities arise that offer a non-traditional path for working with faculty and students with an interest in art or design. This poster session proposes a unique way to utilize outreach and communication to both faculty and students campus wide through a library-sponsored art competition.

After being charged with a way to acquire student art work for the Main Library at Michigan State University, I set out on a path to organize and promote an art competition on campus. My poster session will outline the process of starting with just the idea of an art competition and will follow through to the final result of awarding the prize. Tasks included everything from setting dates and constructing a lengthy set of rules and guidelines to designing and distributing promotional materials, reaching out to students and faculty for advice, selecting and organizing a panel of judges, receiving submissions in accordance with the submission guidelines, judging the entries, and finally, making arrangements for a reception to honor the winning artist and his work. Not only was the creation and implementation of a campus-wide art competition a challenge, but the uncertainty of whether anyone would submit entries was unnerving. With support from library administration, the competition was a success and is now funded permanently through the creation of an art competition endowment.

This poster session relates to the conference theme of the “Future of Art and Visual Resources Librarianship,” specifically, how the library can increase its visibility across campus. The poster session proposes an unusual yet effective way to reach out and engage students across campus to interact with the library through a campus-wide art competition. Sharing this information with colleagues will allow them to be better prepared if asked to conduct a competition at their own institution.

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