Lumos!

Casting Light on the Impact of Graduate Student Led Assessment Work

The University of Washington Libraries host an annual Harry Potter themed trivia event to welcome new students to the libraries. Graduate Assistants have led the assessment of thee event, which traditionally involves a two-question post-it assessment following the trivia game. Responses are coded by theme and interpreted. Follow-up includes post event surveys and or a focus group. All of the data collected is then presented in a written report.

By providing GAs the opportunity to wrestle with data and present information, as well as working through a full assessment cycle, this project has given three generations of graduate students an introduction to library assessment work. This poster is a compilation of reflections and themes across three consecutive Assessment GAs' experiences. Our key takeaways form a framework which can be replicated across departments.

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Graduate Student Professional Development Framework

Autonomy

Challenge your students to do self-directed work.

We were given the autonomy to design and implement the assessment according to our interests, while still having the opportunity to confer with and be advised by our supervisors.

- This allowed us to gain confidence in decision making and asking for feedback while maintaining a sense of ownership throughout the project. We had the freedom to pick and choose what methods we used, one notable instance is the implementation of an in-person focus group in 2018.
- We were given the freedom to choose how in depth or creative we wanted to be. Harrington et al. (2019), support the importance of teachers shifting to a facilitative role, where students can outline their learning outcomes. For example, in 2019 there was an attendance drop compared to previous years which inspired a section outlining recommendations for future events to consider.
- Our voices and visions were prioritized and valued. This created an empowering and meaningful work experience.

Support

Model collaboration and facilitate self-advocacy.

LIS professional literature has explored the benefits of mentorship and team-based engagement models for graduate student employees (Lacy & Copeland, 2013; Denda & Hunter, 2016). We recognize elements of these models in our GA careers, which not only imparted knowledge of assessment work, but also supported our integration into professional LIS culture. We identified the following sources of support as especially formative:

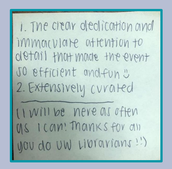
- Direct, specific offers of support from our supervisors during each stage of the project. These offers helped us to understand the kinds of support we could request and established norms around collaboration.
- Feedback from stakeholders in meetings co-facilitated by supervisors. Receiving and processing stakeholder feedback acquainted us with the iterative nature of assessment and allowed us to practice communicating across teams in a semi-structured setting.
- Regular supervisor check-ins to reflect on student experiences, goals, and learning needs.

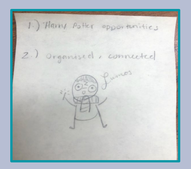
Experience

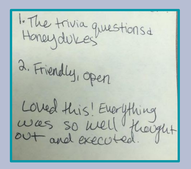
Create opportunities to learn by doing.

Several characteristics of this project made it an ideal learning experience:

- Building on the example of previous years' assessment enabled us to see the role of iteration in the assessment process from the very beginning of our time in the position.
- We made independent decisions, allowing us to apply and build on prior knowledge and expertise. This created a learning environment similar to that proposed by problem-based learning, which asks students to tackle complex real-world problems by applying prior knowledge and creating new understanding (Schmidt et al., 2011).
- We were responsible for all stages of the assessment process. This helped us build a variety of skills and competencies that we were able to apply in future projects. By working through the entire assessment cycle, we also experienced the entire Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2018): we had the experience of data collection and analysis, reflected on the successes and shortfalls of the experience through reporting, considered the possible application of our learning through making recommendations for future years, and then applied our new understanding in other projects.







When creating graduate student projects, what do you consider? By combining supported autonomy with opportunities for experiential learning, supervisors can create an ideal environment for graduate student professional development.

Click here to view our references and recommendations for further reading..