

Laura Turner

# Word of mouth and library workshops

Let's get people talking

**A**s the instructor for Copley Library's Google Scholar workshops, I found myself on the receiving end of surprising emails from students and faculty at the University of San Diego in fall semester 2016.

*"Please let me know if adding another Google Scholar Workshop is possible and also if there is anything that I can do."*

*"Are you available for a Google Scholar workshop sometime after 2:30 this Thursday? If not this week, maybe next week?"*

*"I notice that you have taught several workshops on Google Scholar. I'm wondering if you've posted any summary of these workshops online, or whether perhaps you might have some handouts."*

Attendance at my previous Google Scholar workshops had always been hit or miss, with mostly misses. Having even five students attend those workshops, which I typically offered once a semester, felt like a victory. In November 2015, I revamped my workshop instruction plan, changing it from a one-hour to a twenty-minute format, and focused on ten key tips to avoid overwhelming students. I also spent time at the 2016 ALA Midwinter Meeting exhibits, gathering branded items from the vendors of research databases to which we subscribe. I wanted to offer prizes representing and

promoting our valuable research databases to all attendees.

In preparation, I updated my library research guide and printed its link on colorful bookmarks as a handout. I reviewed recent library literature on teaching Google Scholar and created another handout to help students keep track of their search terms and results. I combed through examples to display, and I practiced repeatedly.

To accommodate busy student schedules, I asked our workshop committee to offer my workshop four times throughout the spring semester 2016. They scheduled me for a variety of days of the week and times of day to reach the greatest number of participants. The library usually avoids scheduling weekend workshops, but I even asked to have one Google Scholar session offered on a Sunday afternoon.

Once I had firm dates, I brainstormed marketing ideas. In my excitement of transforming the workshop, I tried a variety of promotional methods: leaving mini-table tents around library reading room tables, creating a poster for the library foyer, and posting signs around campus. I also contacted faculty in my liaison area as well as

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student support administrators on campus to alert them to the workshops.

### **Workshop 2.0**

I looked forward to hosting my first workshop that semester, even though I only had two registered attendees. To my surprise, the attendees included a psychology professor and an administrator from that department. They wanted to know more about Google Scholar to find out why psychology students were using it for most of their research. With just two participants, the short workshop turned into a longer consultation, and by the time they left, I demonstrated that Google Scholar could effectively be used for student research with a little training. They were impressed to see that Google Scholar results frequently linked to our research databases, and the professor in particular appreciated the use of “Cited By” and “Related” sources for citation pearl growing. I even let them pick a prize for their attendance.

For my second workshop that semester, I had only one participant, a faculty member from our Communication Studies department. This workshop-turned-consultation also lasted an hour as we explored Google Scholar more thoroughly, and I helped him locate some citations for his research. We talked about other research databases, as well, and did some comparisons of functionality and results.

For my final two workshops, including the weekend workshop, I had two students registered but no one showed up. How disappointing. I did a little soul-searching and decided that after one more semester of trying a shorter student workshop, I would change it into a faculty workshop to explain how and why students could use Google Scholar.

### **Another chance**

At the beginning of the new 2016-17 school year, I offered to do two Google Scholar student workshops for fall semester, but by then I had given away my prizes to the library’s work-study student assistants. I didn’t prepare promotional signs and table tents,

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### **Sometimes word of mouth works better than any promotional ideas we dream up.**

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and I let the workshop committee pick dates and times. Nevertheless, I refreshed my guide once more and prepared my bookmarks and other handouts. As the date neared for my first workshop, I was told by the workshop committee that registration was full, with 25 students registered. On the day of my workshop, I provided a sign-in sheet for students and gathered some demographic information. Aside from a graduate student who showed up unregistered, most of the students were undergraduates taking psychology courses.

For my second workshop that semester, 22 students registered, again mostly undergraduate psychology. The real surprise for me came two days later, when a psychology student contacted me to see if I would offer it again that semester for several student athletes that missed the first two. I quickly worked out arrangements with her to offer it again at their convenience. Serendipitously, on the day of the workshop, a faculty member in our Religious Studies department emailed me to ask if I had any handouts or other ways of accessing training on Google Scholar. I mentioned my workshop already scheduled for that day and he brought his entire seminar group over, for a total of 11 attendees. Three weeks later, another undergraduate psychology student contacted me and asked if I could offer it once again. Against my better judgment, I agreed to offer it on the Monday before Thanksgiving, but the date did not deter four students from attending. Success!

Sometimes, word of mouth works better than any promotional ideas we dream up. However, for word of mouth to work, we have to be patient, be invested in our efforts, and offer something worth the catch. In my case, faculty attending my first revamped workshop saw something they liked. I just needed to give them time to get the word out. //