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Hack Your Campus: Collaboration with Competition

Introduction

In March of this year, Grand Valley State University Libraries and the Seidman College of Business's Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) collaborated on the first annual Hack Your Campus competition. Hack Your Campus is an entrepreneurial competition that asks students to submit ideas for improving some aspect of GVSU's campus or services as part of a competitive pitching event. Ideas can either improve existing programs and services, or propose entirely new ones. The best ideas earn substantial cash prizes.

Hack your campus was modeled on several other successful pitching programs, such as 1000 pitches (<https://1000pitches.com/>) and the GVSU Student Collegiate Entrepreneur's Club Idea Pitch competition (<http://www.ceogvsu.com/idea-pitch>). Our vision was to provide students with the opportunity to practice innovation and communication skills while also channeling their creative energy towards improving the campus. We also set out to establish working relationships between the CEI and University Libraries, with the goal of bringing more business students and business student organizations into the library. This experience articulated the importance of campus partnerships while also showcasing the library as a discovery space where students could connect with experts and exchange ideas.

Partnerships and Sponsors

We recruited campus partners from many different departments and organizations, such as the Padnos International Center and the Honors College. Partners contributed nominal amounts of financial support as well as contributing staff time to evaluate ideas and serve as points of contact for students developing ideas related to their departments.

An important part of the judging criteria for the competition was feasibility. Students were expected to supply logical reasoning and background research to demonstrate that their ideas were at least potentially workable. Because the event organizers were not qualified to judge the feasibility of ideas in all the contest submission categories (including Food Service, Facilities, Sustainability, and more) it was necessary to involve campus partners who could provide the needed expertise.

Research Workshops

A week prior to the competition we held a pitching workshop on the main campus. Students received research help from the Business Librarian, pitching tips and advice from CEI staff, and were able to ask general questions about the big day. The workshop was held during evening hours (6-7 p.m.) for student convenience. Research questions ranged from finding campus security crime statistics to locating demographics for both GVSU and the greater Grand Rapids area. We also fielded questions about how to cite sources on their handouts and slides, and where to find copyright-free images.

GVSU's Digital Initiatives Librarian built the Hack Your Campus website (www.gvsu.edu/hackyourcampus), which provided additional resources for pitching tips and advice, as well as links to APA citation guidelines. At the workshop's conclusion we noticed the students were exchanging phone numbers to organize an additional study session to practice their pitches; we were satisfied to see such collaboration and dedication.

Day of the Event

The day of the event went very quickly. Students were asked to arrive at the main library at 8:30 a.m. for registration and check-in. Library volunteers staffed the registration desk and provided nametags and directions to participants. At 8:45 librarians met with first-round judges for a brief orientation. First-round pitching began at 9 a.m. in the library's presentation practice rooms. By 10 o'clock, six finalists had been selected and escorted to the atrium level of the library for intermission and light refreshments. Judges for the final round arrived at this time for scorecards and a brief orientation. Final round presentations began promptly at 10:15 and concluded by 11:15. First, second, and third place winners were announced at 11:30. The conclusion of the competition provided the ideal time for participants, organizers, judges, and audience members to network, mingle, and debrief about the event.

Goals

The event had several goals: first, to establish a working relationship with the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, in the hopes of funneling more entrepreneurial activity in the library. This seems to be at least initially successful. The CEI staff were very positive about the event and enthusiastic about continuing to work together. Second, to provide an opportunity for students from diverse campus areas to learn and practice innovation and communication skills. An examination of student participants reveals involvement from a wide variety from different disciplinary areas, including business, engineering, and the humanities. Third, to convey to students the idea that the library is a space for discovery and innovation. Participating in the competition meant that students were able to utilize several of the library's collaborative spaces. In one morning, participants made use of the presentation practice rooms, the Knowledge Market (where peer research consultants are stationed), the library's Argo Tea storefront, and the Multipurpose room, a room often unnoticed by students.

Suggestions for the future

Debriefing after the event revealed a number of logistical issues, most of which could be resolved by revising the timeline so that planning and coordination begins earlier. In particular, publicizing and advertising the event requires time, energy, and money. Recruiting sponsors to the event also required time and energy, and we hope starting earlier will allow us to get more folks on board. Eventually, we'd like to move to a video pitch format similar to the one used by 1000 Pitches that would allow us to involve our technology showcase, a technology discovery space inside the library and managed by the campus IT department. Students could check out video equipment and film their pitches in the space, while librarians could provide some basic video editing help.

Conclusion

Overall, Hack Your Campus was a success. We were beyond impressed by the great ideas our students pitched. This is an innovative and fun partnership, where everyone involved is enthusiastic about future installments. Visit the Hack Your Campus website to read about this year's winners: www.gvsu.edu/hackyourcampus.

Works Cited

"1000 Pitches." Retrieved from <https://1000pitches.com/>

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