

Academic BRASS

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Business Librarians Need Interactivity Too! Organizing the BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Spring Online Symposium

Background:

Starting in 2018, ALA initiated a redesign of the Annual Conference structure to meet organizational goals of making the conference campus smaller, providing more high-quality and high-attendance programming, and helping attendees find content relevant to their professional role. While this redesign led to many positive outcomes for ALA overall, as detailed in post-conference survey feedback, it also meant BRASS lost many opportunities for conference sessions as our previously guaranteed program slots disappeared into the competitive proposal process. The loss of these opportunities for professional development and scholarship at Conference is especially detrimental to

many academic business librarians because their jobs often require presentations for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment.

Being industrious, business librarians across North America – BRASS members or not – created new opportunities for professional development and scholarship online and at other venues, such as the Charleston Conference. In spring 2018, the Business Librarian Online Conference offered a full day of programming, but it was not repeated in the following year. The Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee saw an opportunity to build upon the success of its Fall Lightning Talks Series and fill the gap left by the Business Librarian Online Conference in spring 2019 by creating the Spring Online Symposium, a half-day workshop with four presenters offering case studies and practical takeaways for academic business librarians everywhere.

Procedures/Summary:

During a February meeting, the chair of the Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee asked for volunteers to help plan the spring symposium. The planning group comprised four total members: the committee chair and three members-at-large. The group's first task was to create a [Call for Proposals](#), which was then distributed on the brass-l and BUSLIB-L listservs. The submission window was open for three weeks, and the committee received eleven proposals. Each group member individually reviewed the proposals and selected five that best aligned with the symposium's goals, with priority given to RUSA BRASS members. Based on each member's selections, the group collaboratively chose four proposals from the set of submissions. The symposium was initially planned to consist of three consecutive presentations, mirroring the fall's lightning talk series. However, the group decided to restructure the symposium based on the strength and variety of submissions. In order to accommodate four presentations instead of three, the symposium was divided into two morning sessions, an intermission, and two afternoon sessions.

After the proposals were selected and the symposium structure was updated, the chair of the committee extended invitations to the prospective presenters. When all four presenters confirmed their continued interest in participating and provided their times of availability, the group solidified May 10th as the symposium date. The chair sent an announcement email containing a registration form with [session descriptions](#) to the BUSLIB-L listserv. In total, 147 individuals registered for the symposium. In preparation for the symposium, the chair collected presenter biographies and the group members volunteered to moderate individual sessions. The group also offered the presenters two practice sessions to ensure that all participants felt comfortable with the technology.

On May 10th, the symposium was conducted via the chair's institutional Zoom account. The group chose to use Zoom's Webinar feature to both accommodate the registration size and give the presenters and moderators more control over the technology. The chair, session moderator, and presenter joined their session fifteen minutes prior to the official start time to ensure the technology was running smoothly. Each session commenced with the moderator: welcoming attendees; iterating that each session would be recorded and distributed to attendees later in the day; providing a link to a feedback form and soliciting attendee responses; quickly outlining the session's structure; introducing the presenter and their topic; and finally, turning the proceedings over to the presenter. The sessions consisted of a 30-minute presentation followed by 15-minutes reserved for discussion and addressing any lingering questions. Each presentation averaged about 50 live attendees. Not only were symposium participants able to engage with a diverse set of thematic presentations, but participants were also able to engage with the content in real time through various technological tools.

Outcomes/Feedback:

While the experience of the symposium was fresh in everyone's minds, the chair of the planning committee sent out links to the recordings for each session, plus online evaluation forms. Participants could comment on and rate the four individual sessions, as well as the overall program. In all cases, the four sessions were rated highly by all who responded. Respondents overwhelmingly found the sessions interesting, useful for their professional development, and of good professional value. Over 90% of participants were able to watch the sessions live, with others viewing the recordings later. Currently, we do not have a way to collect responses as people watch the recordings over time, but there may be a way to receive feedback after the day of the event; something the committee can discuss for future sessions.

We received a variety of comments regarding both the content and the delivery of the symposium. Respondents were by and large very comfortable with Zoom as a platform, and many participants enjoyed the emphasis on interactivity both within the sessions themselves and the tools demonstrated for later application. More than one person commented on the timeliness of the topics and expressed enthusiasm that the sessions were recorded for later viewing and review.

Based on the feedback we received, we were encouraged that we addressed three of our primary goals; that we host sessions that are highly interactive, as requested by members, that sessions offer takeaways and avenues for interacting with the session and the topic going forward, and that we cover a variety of topics that were deemed relevant and important to business librarians.

Conclusion: Going Forward

The positive response to the symposium indicates a high demand for interactive, relevant webinar content in academic business librarianship. In particular, the interactive component appears to be the key ingredient to the success of the symposium. The conclusion to be reached from this is that any BRASS affiliate preparing to create a webinar should consider requiring all content to have interactive components.

The BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee plans to continue its programming along these lines, serving the goals of providing more venues for tenure-track librarians to contribute nationally, providing interactive webinars, and providing content that our members can use for professional development.