

## **Art Show Paints a Collaborative Picture**

Stark, Paris, Rogan, Finnegan Dopkins, and Etter

# Art Show Paints a Collaborative Picture: Increasing Engagement in a Pharmacy and Health Sciences Library

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### Abstract

*Objective:* To increase student, staff, and faculty engagement with the health sciences library.

*Methods:* Faculty, staff, and students were encouraged to create pharmacy-themed artworks and submit them to the library for entry into an art show. A two-hour art show and gala were planned for library patrons to view art pieces submitted by faculty, staff, and students. Participation data was collected during the event and compared to previous programming held at the health sciences library.

*Results:* The *PharmArt* program determined a metric of demonstrable success would show as an uptick in participation; both physical and digital, when compared against previous library events. Physical participation was measured through program attendance and art piece submission. Participating demographics were represented by all target populations of faculty, staff, and students with a total increase of 52 participants (347% increase) over the previous event. Engagement through social media showed a considerable increase in clicks (2224%), shares (1200%), and overall reach (24%) within the school community.

*Conclusions:* Incorporating student, staff, and faculty art works into a library-hosted event increased participation in a library program compared to previous library programming. Attendance and Social Media engagement increased considerably. Faculty, librarians, and students were brought together to share a common creative interest and to promote a casual atmosphere in which cross-curricular ideas could be discussed among attendees.

### Introduction

The Rite Aid Information Commons (RAIC) is the health sciences library serving the University of the Pacific Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. The school supports the academic success of students studying pharmacy, audiology, physical therapy, and speech language pathology. Library events at the RAIC, such as the *Better Hearing & Speech Month (BHSM)* Kickoff Party, have traditionally had poor attendance, even with social media marketing and incentives such as raffle prizes. Due to the lack of engagement, many event goals were unmet (for example, providing important information regarding diseases and other health-related subjects), prompting a reevaluation of library programming at the RAIC.

Research increasingly supports library programs that provide students the opportunity to actively participate in creative endeavors at the intersection of art and science in order to view different facets of established academic and clinical concepts [1, 2]. In collaboration with

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pharmacy faculty, the RAIC hosted an art event and subsequent pop-up art gallery with the goals of 1) increasing engagement and collaboration with faculty and students and 2) improving patron interest in the library through creative and participatory library services.

The event, entitled *PharmArt*, was designed to encourage collaborative creative activity and stimulate discussion among artists and participants. Since the library is a neutral space, the RAIC provided a welcoming environment for artistic expression, which is recommended for the exchange of cross-curricular ideas [3]. The exhibit also provided pharmacy students and faculty an opportunity to interact socially with students from other disciplines.

Participation was broadly solicited from faculty, staff, and students within the School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and works from every physical art medium were welcomed. The theme of the art show was “Knowing Your Pharmacist and the Local History of Pharmacy.”

### Objective

Previous programming at the RAIC had low participation, with just 15 attendees at the *Better Hearing & Speech Month (BHSM)* kickoff event. The primary goal of *PharmArt* was to positively increase student and faculty engagement in person and online at the RAIC by hosting an active, participatory library program. Not only did *PharmArt* improve event turnout to 67 attendees from *BHSM*'s 15 (347%), it also increased online engagement by 24 (1200%) Facebook shares and reactions. The secondary goal was to explore if students, faculty, and staff would be interested in a library-hosted art program. This goal was facilitated by encouraging creative participation from nine faculty, staff, and students who submitted eleven works of art, as well as providing attendees with the opportunity to vote in the art show.

### Literature Review

Libraries are discovering methods to reshape space through art and aesthetics in order to connect with the community and draw in new users. A review of the literature reveals that art shows and galleries are created with much success not only in campus libraries, but in science and health sciences libraries as well.

Beals' 2007 article on student art in library exhibitions details not only the process of setting up an exhibition program, but also the rationale [3]. In this often-cited article, Beals explores the process of designating the exhibition space, creating submission procedures, and deploying publicity, among other important logistical considerations, for the University of Tennessee

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Libraries. The process includes the creation of an inviting and visually appealing space, as well as providing an educational purpose that supports the library's mission. Similarly, the University of Colorado invited the general community to explore non-traditional uses of library space by establishing an art gallery that showcases works by local and visiting artists [4].

Science and health sciences libraries are also realizing the value of art in science learning. The Albert R. Mann Library at Cornell University, which serves agriculture, life science and human ecology programs, has created an art gallery that attempts to create interdisciplinary knowledge and communicate science through visual imagery, such as sculpture, drawing, photography, and illustration [5]. For the Marston Science Library at University of Florida, an art contest called "Elegance of Science" encourages faculty, students, and staff to compete for awards and recognition, while also providing campus art connoisseurs the opportunity to reflect and contemplate the discoveries of life [6].

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) has contributed to interdisciplinary learning innovation by creating the NLM Traveling Exhibition Program that health science libraries can adopt to engage with users. Previous high-interest themes include health science topics found in Frankenstein and Harry Potter novels. Outcomes of the NLM's traveling galleries reveal that they positively change users' perceptions of the library and bring more people through the doors [7].

Additionally, art shows and galleries are increasingly proving to be both ice breakers and sandboxes for future collaboration between faculty and librarians. Catalano et al. point out that disparate areas of the school, such as the health sciences and arts programs, all share something in common: the library [8]. College and university libraries that have indicated an explicit desire to increase outcomes of faculty-librarian connections and collaborations through art include:

- University of Akron Science & Technology library, which created a gallery of artistic journal covers of published faculty research [9]
- Fort Lewis College Reed Library, which emphasized student success outcomes within the College's mission [10]
- Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library at George Washington University Medical Center, where the library's art show has flourished since 1979 and has become a popular annual tradition embedded within the culture of the campus [11]

Throughout the literature, the common denominator in libraries developing an art show or establishing an art gallery is to further the library's mission, supported by the ideal of the library

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as a service organization with eight functions described by Frieda O. Weise in her 2003 Janet Doe Lecture as: a physical symbol of knowledge, an intellectual commons, a haven for research, a place for collaboration, an access point for information, a forum to teach, a functional and pleasant workplace, and an attractive gateway to the campus [12]. Art shows can embody these functions within the library by combining art with science to provide novel learning experiences for students between disciplines and encourage collaboration between faculty and librarians, where Beals states: “conversation is stimulated, participation is encouraged, and new experiences are gained.” [3].

### Methods

In an effort to engage students, faculty, and staff in library programming, library staff working in conjunction with a School of Pharmacy faculty member, held a pharmacy-themed art show designed to bring together the various health sciences communities served by the RAIC. The name *PharmArt* was chosen for the pilot event to support American Pharmacists Month, with the majority of the marketing targeted to School of Pharmacy faculty, staff, and students. Submission requirements also included a local history of pharmacy theme, to encourage artists and viewers to connect their learning with the event.

Library staff released requests for art submissions on the health sciences campus during the summer of 2015 through social media accounts and print advertising displayed in campus libraries and health sciences buildings. The *PharmArt* gala was scheduled for October 13<sup>th</sup> from noon to 1pm. The submission process asked that prospective artists submit information about their works through a Google form, which was also accessible through a QR Code created at Kaywa.com. Artists were informed through email communications from library staff as to when and where to submit their artwork during the event. As the event date approached, internal reminders about the event were emailed to faculty and staff. Pharmacy faculty were asked to promote the event to their students. Student library staff were trained to answer common questions about submissions, contest details, and the event, as well as encourage participation and attendance to anyone inquiring.

The library decided to organize the event in the style of a gala in the hopes of drawing additional interest. To meet this end, the gala event organizers obtained a \$500 budget from the University Library to purchase food and drinks, prizes, and necessary exhibit staging for artwork and decorations. Knowing food would be a popular inducement, funds were set aside for that purpose in addition to the library purchasing door and participation prizes for the top three art pieces to be awarded in the days following the *PharmArt* art show. The prizes

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selected were a one-terabyte external hard drive, a \$25.00 Amazon gift card, a university tote bag, and a \$15.00 iTunes card. These were allocated as first, second, third, and door prizes respectively. Prizes were awarded through the use of raffle tickets given to attendees as they entered. Mention of raffle prizes and free food played a part in the in-house and online marketing campaigns.

During the event, the library remained open, however users were informed that the event might be disruptive. Art pieces were placed on display with a card stating title, artist, and art medium on the day of the event and, during the event, artists were encouraged to stand near their art and discuss it with viewers. Raffle tickets were given to *PharmArt* exhibit attendees for a door prize and also used as voting ballots for patrons' favorite art pieces. These tickets were tallied after the event day and prizes were awarded and ribbons placed. All art pieces were assigned numbers which were displayed prominently on the title card, which was used to record the vote selection.

At the event, attendees were encouraged to mingle while enjoying the different art displays and then place a vote for the piece they liked best by dropping their ticket, with contact information and vote recorded on the back, in a secured box. After the show, votes were tallied and winners determined based on number of votes. The art remained on display for several weeks following the exhibition.

The library determined the number of students, faculty, and staff who attended the event by conducting patron counts at the beginning, middle, and end of the event, and by asking all attendees to put their basic information on a ticket used to vote for the best art work. In order to exclude patrons who were in the library for more traditional use, such as studying, attendance counts for *PharmArt* was checked against the number of tickets collected, removing library users who did not participate in the *PharmArt* event from the final attendance count.

### Results

To determine if the *PharmArt* program theme and marketing efforts netted a broader audience and increased online engagement, the library compared metrics collected from a prior event. First, the research team assessed attendance and social media 'hits' from *PharmArt* to the same information recorded during an earlier event held at the library, the *Better Hearing and Speech Month (BHSM)* kickoff party. Compared to data collected from the *BHSM* event in May of the same year, *PharmArt* successfully increased the target demographic attendance in the library, and increased the library's social media presence.

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Attendance at *PharmArt* recorded an increase of 347% above *BHSM*. A total of 67 individuals attended the art show, improving the attendance numbers from the previous *BHSM* program, which drew only 15 attendees (Table 1). Over the course of the *PharmArt* gala, 67 raffle tickets were handed out and 60 votes were received, indicating a willingness of attendees to participate and contribute to the event. All metrics for social media also indicated a marked increase (Table 1). Facebook metrics showed a gain in posts (+393.33%), shares/reactions (+1200%), cumulative reach (+24.07%), and click-throughs (+2223.53%). The library's *PharmArt* blog post hits experienced a gain of 23.08% over *BHSM*.

	<b>Better Hearing &amp; Speech Month</b> May 2015	<b>PharmArt</b> October 2015
<b>Total Attendance</b>	15	67
Student	11	54
Faculty	3	7
Staff	1	6
<b>Blog Post Hits</b>	26	32
<b>Facebook Page Posts</b>	6	29
<b>Facebook Shares/Reactions</b>	2	26
<b>Facebook Cumulative Reach</b>	108	134
<b>Facebook Click Throughs</b>	17	395

Table 1. Physical Attendance and Social Media Engagement

Additionally, it was demonstrated anecdotally that the target community was interested in participating in an art show. Student staff workers regularly answered queries about the event in the month leading up to the gala and, by the date of the gala, the library had received a rich cross section of representation of art works in a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media. All 11 art pieces that artists submitted for the art show were approved and included in the event. The ratio of university patron types participating was diverse, with 4 students, 3 faculty and 2 staff comprising the cohort of 9 artists. Furthermore, art was submitted not only from the School of Pharmacy, but also from other areas of the university: of the 11 art submissions, 6 came from the School of Pharmacy, 3 from the University Library, 1 from Computer Engineering, and 1 from the Business program.

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### Discussion

Compared to previous library programming, the engagement metrics reveal that *PharmArt* generated interest and participation amongst the faculty, staff, and students in the Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. The use of a common creative interest allowed these normally separate groups to engage in a more casual atmosphere that helped to remove some of the barriers experienced within a university setting. Participants included members of the different departments and disciplines of the school. Verbal feedback from participants provided during the event was positive and showed that the library can be a place for engagement as well as learning.

The primary goal of increasing student and faculty engagement for an active, participatory library program was achieved. Not only did RAIC notice improvement for in-person attendance, but online engagement and interaction increased as well. An art show, in particular, may help online and social media marketing of the library since it is a visual, aesthetic medium that complements online spaces.

The secondary goal of exploring interest in a library-hosted art program revealed that interest is very good, as the ratio of art participants included members from the three targeted patron groups: students, faculty and staff. Furthermore, the majority of art gala attendees participated in the art show itself through voting for their favorite art pieces.

Previous events at the library, such as *BHSM*, did not include active participation and were unsuccessful in generating engagement and participation. By finding a common creative interest and developing a program that brought all together, the library space transformed from the everyday usage as a study and snacking area to a collaborative engagement area, where students, faculty, and staff mingled, interacted and participated in a pop-up art gallery.

### Limitations

A major limitation is that the research primarily calculates the quantitative increase in patron engagement of *PharmArt* within the library and online in social media but does not assess qualitative data. Samples of qualitative data that would be relevant and helpful to discuss include whether patrons enjoyed the art show, found it useful, or learned something new. As only one *PharmArt* event has been held, future shows could include qualitative assessments or interviews, and this data could be combined with engagement metrics to build a more complete picture on the quality of engagement with the attendees.



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Another limitation in the study concerns other events or factors that could influence attendance. The timing of events, for example, could be construed as potentially helping or hurting attendance. In this study, attendance at *BHSM* was held in the time leading up to mid-term exams and also just before the release of speech therapy students for their summer break, whereas *PharmArt* was held following mid-terms: as such, the difference could be construed to affect attendance. Time of year could also have an effect, as students in spring semester may be more interested in outside activities, whereas fall semester weather may be more conducive to indoor activities and events. The seasonal difference could also affect online engagement if patrons are more interested in outdoor activities in the spring rather than the fall.

### Future Directions

The success of the first *PharmArt* show has led the RAIC to begin developing future programs involving art and examining how this active participation can help students develop skills for stress relief and confidence building. The use of art in pharmacy curricula is very limited but has shown to be helpful in other health science disciplines. Multiple studies on observing the effects of art on student development and pedagogies have been conducted primarily in medical school programs, and can provide outcomes that encourage discussion and understanding as it relates to patient care [13]. For example, in one study, a cross-disciplinary approach for developing medical insight incorporated the use of visual arts with medical themes: following the evaluation of artwork, students self-reported the positive development of observation, decision-making, reflection, and confidence-building skills [14]. In another study, medical students who took part in an arts-based learning course noted enhancement of awareness in self, improvement in self-confidence and self-care, increased preparation for stress, and development of communication and team-building skills [15]. In a study where students created and presented original artwork based on interactions with individuals living with chronic diseases, creative art was found to impact personal growth, self-discovery, sense of community and collaboration skills [16]. Medical education studies such as these can help inform the development of research in pharmacy education that incorporate interdisciplinary activities, forming a nexus between art and science that could help future pharmacists develop important self-awareness and community-building tools.

Recently revised education and accreditation standards in Pharmacy now include interdisciplinary and metacognition elements and programs such as *PharmArt* can help schools and colleges meet these requirements [17, 18]. At the RAIC, future research is planned to

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determine the effect of art and creativity on professionalism, stress relief, and confidence in health professional students.

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