

7-2016

# Library Programming for Adults: Unconference Discussions and Beyond

Molly Allen

Central Washington University, [molly.allen@cwu.edu](mailto:molly.allen@cwu.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

Allen, M. (2016). Library programming for adults: Unconference discussions and beyond. *Alki* 32(2), 10-11.

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# Library Programming for Adults: Unconference Discussions and Beyond

by Molly Allen

The 2016 WLA Conference in Spokane offered the first session to be described as an Unconference-within-a-Conference in WLA history. The super-sized session, held Friday afternoon after almost two full days of conference sessions, was a great way to wind down and to openly explore programming ideas in libraries. From the conference description, the SAIL (Serving Adults in Libraries) Unconference used well established unconference methods and encouraged attendees to come ready to discuss the hottest topics in adult services and programming. And that's exactly what the group did.

The session kicked off with each attendee introducing themselves, including which library they came from, and why they were interested in the unconference. Most attendees were from public libraries in Washington State, with only two attendees from academic libraries: one from Eastern Washington University and the other from Central Washington University.

The unconference was loosely structured, which was a good thing. Unconferences are designed to share ideas, build community, and offer an open space for innovation. The moderator posed questions when the conversations lulled, but for the most part, participants actively discussed the ways they are engaging adult populations at their libraries and in their communities. It was a fantastic way to share what attendees have been doing at their libraries, what worked and what didn't, and to gain new ideas.

A few adult programming ideas discussed:

- Host a 'book-ish' happy hour, trivia night, or a storytelling event in a local bar.
- Host a meet-up group in the library, offering a safe place for community members to meet each other and to share interests.
- DIY Fest: Bring DIY aficionados and makers together for a day of play. Incorporate entertainment, demonstrations, and even food trucks for a community-wide event.
- When considering film screenings, as many libraries do, take the film out of the library. Most patrons have no interest in sitting in the library for a movie. Partner with local theatres or other venues to bring your screening out into the community.

- Host an Adulting Series: Include topics like "How to Clothes" or "How to Money" to appeal to younger generations. Bring experts in to discuss helpful tips on these topics.

## A Sample of Programming at the Brooks Library

Adult programming is a main focus of the Brooks Library at Central Washington University (CWU). Serving as the hub for informational resources to 18,000 Ellensburg residents, 10,400 college students, and 6,400 residents from the surrounding areas of Cle Elum, Kittitas, Roslyn, and Thorp, the Brooks Library has developed a robust calendar of programming to engage a variety of patrons. The Brooks Library is both a Federal Depository and public library, so many outreach efforts are directed toward bringing community members into the library to make them aware of services and to introduce patrons to a useful community space.

When introducing new programming, the Brooks Library looks at the ways the event may benefit our student population, how it will engage faculty and staff on campus, and how it may bring more community members into the library.

The Annual Brooks Library Gala and Silent Auction is the most prominent of our events. This evening event invites campus faculty, staff, and students, as well as the community at-large into the library to experience the four floors of resources and services we have to offer in a new light. Attendees enjoy music, dancing in the stacks,



*Dancing in the stacks at the Annual Brooks Library Gala and Silent Auction.*

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*Molly Allen is the Program Support Supervisor for the Brooks Library at Central Washington University.*

local food and wine, art, poetry, and a silent auction throughout the evening. Because activities are spread throughout the building, new community patrons are able to wander the building and familiarize themselves with what the Brooks Library has to offer in a casual atmosphere.

The University Archives and Special Collections Department of the Brooks Library hosts an annual Archives Crawl, inviting community members to view collections related to the community at-large. The Archives partners with other local repositories such as the Ellensburg Public Library, Kittitas County Historical Museum, CWU Museum of Culture and Environment, and Kittitas County Genealogical Society to offer a van tour of their facilities, introducing attendees to information and services available to them within the city of Ellensburg. The tour concludes with a visit to the Brooks Library Archives and Special Collections, showing off some of the greatest hits within the collection including letterman jackets, scrapbooks from campus dorms made during the 1950s and 1960s, and yearbooks dating back to 1906.

National Poetry Month proves to be a successful celebration every year at the Brooks Library. This year, a number of community oriented poetry events were organized throughout the month in collaboration with campus faculty. Our bilingual poetry series has proven to be quite popular. Each week in April, poetry was read in the native language of various countries, as well as in English, allowing attendees to experience the pronunciation and flow of words in a different way. Poetry evenings included Arabic, French, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish. Our English/Spanish poetry reading, held in partnership with our Latino Americans 500 Years of History grant, proved to be so successful that we brought it out into the community. The second Latino Heritage Bilingual Reading and Community Potluck was held in Downtown Ellensburg in collaboration with a Spanish conversation group and the Ellensburg Public Library.

The Brooks Library hosts a book club each quarter, inviting students, faculty, and community members to participate. The book club has brought students and community members together in the same space and has increased awareness of Summit borrowing. Popular, compelling titles are chosen based on their appeal to a wide audience.

Our partnership with the Kittitas County Chamber of Commerce has continued to flourish. This partnership is a beneficial resource and has offered countless opportunities to network with members of our community. We hosted our first Business After Hours event with the Chamber in October 2015, bringing more than 50 community members into the library. Attendees included realtors, business owners, and non-profit board members who found the

access to our resources surprising and exciting. The Chamber told us this was the most popular Business After Hours event they had ever hosted. We brought simple appetizers into the map room of our Government Publications Services Department, our campus Catering Department served wine, and a local brewery within our community, Iron Horse Brewery, brought in a keg. It was an incredible



*Bilingual poetry reading in honor of National Poetry Month.*

way to network with our community patrons, especially those who play a prominent role in our community.

Each of these events has been running for three years or less, but all have increased awareness of the benefits of our academic library within the Ellensburg community. We have seen an increase in community involvement in our Friends of the Library group and an increase in community patrons and students using the library. The Brooks Library has developed a robust outreach schedule in the past three years and has been thrilled to see the impact of adult programming on students, faculty and staff, and the community at-large. 📖

## JOIN US IN CHELAN, WA OCTOBER 24-26

for our Annual WLA: **WALE conference**. We geared up to provide the best conference yet! **Nancy Pearl** promises a kick-start by presenting a pre-conference and keynoting breakfast! Our enchanted "Night of Romance" guarantees to fascinate us as RWA's 2016 Librarian of the Year Robin Bradford interviews authors Cherry Adair, Susan Mallery and Lauren Dane. With pre-conferences, a full day of sessions and post-conference workshops, there is something for everyone at #WALE16. Sign up for our newsletter by becoming a member of WLA's WALE Section at <http://www.wla.org/>