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Student Work in VCC Libraries: From Mannequins in the Library to a Car on the Third Floor Travaux étudiants dans les bibliothèques du VCC : des mannequins dans la bibliothèque à une voiture au troisième étage

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Article abstract

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Student Work in VCC Libraries: From Mannequins in the Library to a Car on the Third Floor

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Abstract

A range of student creations decorates Vancouver Community College Libraries. These showcase products from trade and design programs. The downtown campus library features mannequins with clothing designed and created by students in addition to display cases of student-made jewelry. We also exhibit styled wigs from students' trades skills competitions and framed illustrations from the digital graphic design and drafting programs. The Broadway library has a small study room that the college's Automotive Collision and Refinishing (ACR) department created from a Smart Car. ACR students also paint our book trucks to practice different designs, techniques, and finishes. Displaying student projects makes the library space more visually interesting. Moreover, the ACR contributions are functional items for the library's operation. Displaying student projects also facilitates library outreach with shop- and studio-based programs. Furthermore, the work aligns with VCC's provision of experiential learning. This project report outlines a successful partnership for library outreach with instructional departments. It includes lessons learned about internal and external communication in project management and what we attribute our successes to for our related event planning.

Keywords

library outreach, trades education, collaboration, library events, social media, student art

Student Work in VCC Libraries

A range of student creations decorates Vancouver Community College (VCC) Libraries. We started with a collection of textile samples in a corner room of our downtown library, for use by students in a design course. A few years later, both of our libraries have prominent displays of completed student work; these showcase products from the college's trade and design programs. The downtown campus location features clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles. The Broadway library has a small study room designed and installed by students; it is a Smart Car with bright green hubcaps and a beautifully executed *Anne of Green Gables*-themed paint job. VCC's Automotive Collision and Refinishing (ACR) department repurposed it from an insurance-company write-off, giving the library some additional seating and their students some hands-on practice. Displaying student projects makes the spaces more visually interesting and facilitates outreach with the college's shop and studio-based programs.

Institutional Context

VCC is an urban, public post-secondary institution with approximately 15,000 students. VCC's vision is to be "the first choice for innovative, experiential learning for life" (Vancouver Community College [VCC], n.d.). College values include providing "an accessible environment where students build the skills, develop the attributes and gain the experience in the classroom, industry and community needed for success now and in the future" (VCC, n.d.). VCC's programs include English as an Additional Language, Health Sciences (nursing and dental hygiene), University Transfer, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Sign Language Studies. The two physical libraries are at the Broadway and downtown campuses. VCC's downtown campus offerings include a range of design programs. Most of these—fashion, jewelry, hairstyling, graphic design, and drafting—contribute student projects to the library. The automotive departments, including ACR, are at the Broadway campus. This case report outlines VCC Libraries' experiences displaying student creations in the library, paying special attention to the value of displaying the ACR products.

Where We Started and What We Have Now

A few years ago, VCC's downtown campus library was working on deepening outreach with the college's design programs. Elena Kuzmina is the liaison librarian for the design, hairstyling, and esthetics programs. She and Sarah Murray, the fashion program department head, discussed a textile draping room. However, the library's available space was not suitable. The inter-departmental conversations did result in a fashion display in the library: two mannequins now wear clothing designed and sewn by students and recent alumni. Next, the jewelry department added display cases for their students' creations. The hairstyling program later provided student entries from hair design competitions; these styled wigs on mannequin heads now line a wall of the downtown library. The digital graphic design faculty contributed as well, after negotiations by librarian Mari Paz Vera: students designed thematic, full-colour fonts for a typography assignment, and the library had them printed as posters. More recently,

we framed and hung drawings by drafting students. All of these displays bring colour and visual interest to the downtown campus library.

The student work at the Broadway (East Vancouver) campus library comes from the ACR students. They envision designs and paint them on book trucks. Many of the designs represent the school or the city in some way: iridescent black with Vancouver's skyline vinyl-plotted on the sides; "VCC green" with patterns inspired by an on-campus awareness campaign; bold colours with "VCC" lettered on the side. Other book truck designs include metallic blue with racing stripes, black with flames, and a wide assortment of other colours with a range of tonal striping. The book truck painting idea came from someone outside the college. David Cross, who was then head of VCC's ACR department, received the suggestion from a librarian from Oregon who was a fellow attendee at a leadership workshop. Employees at VCC Libraries loved the idea, and we began delivering factory beige carts to the ACR shop floor. Our book truck upgrades were recently put on hold as ACR student and faculty talents focused on our biggest-yet piece of student art in a VCC Library: turning a Smart Car into a tiny study room.

Experiential Learning and No Need to Shush

In 2017, VCC librarian Bill Nikolai started researching ways to offer privacy and sound containment for people using their phones in the library. He eventually decided that a small car would be a good starting point for a phone booth. The ACR department agreed to do the work if the library obtained a vehicle. Nikolai persuaded the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) to provide a written-off vehicle. It is a 2001 Smart Fortwo: a micro-compact passenger car designed by Swatch and manufactured and sold by Mercedes-Benz, commonly known as a "Smart Car." In exchange for providing the damaged vehicle, ICBC wanted to use it in their marketing campaigns against distracted driving. ACR department head David Cross decided that the project would be a good fit for students doing a two-year "foundations" diploma. The program is for international students and combines collision repair, refinishing, and apprenticeship training. The diploma provides students with all the skills needed for the Smart Car project including bodywork, fabrication, and refinishing. The duration of the international program also made it suitable for the large project; domestic students in the ACR trades and apprenticeship programs are on campus for a much shorter time.

Figure 1

The Smart Car Arrives at VCC Autobody Shop



Note. Copyright 2018 by Tate Westerman.

When the vehicle arrived (see Figure 1), students from the Automotive Services Technician (AST) program pulled the engine, transmission, and fuel tank, then drained any remaining fluids. ACR students scrubbed and degreased what was left of the vehicle and repaired the damaged body panels. In consultation with the library, students designed what the car would look like. The class had a few brainstorming sessions about features, which ultimately included in-dash phone chargers and softly illuminated headlights and taillights. A fabricated metal “pencil” replaced the gear shift, and a “book” became the steering wheel/book stand/tablet stand. The ACR department painted the car a Mercedes silver and vinyl plotted it with text and images from *Anne of Green Gables* (see Figure 2). ACR instructors Keith Mew and Shafi Mohammad were generous with their time at this stage of the project. The steering wheel book also received text from *Anne*. Librarians suggested this book because its copyright had expired, and VCC’s school colour is green. In September 2019, ACR students and faculty maneuvered the car through upper-floor emergency doors, positioning it between group study tables and periodical shelving.

The project aligns well with VCC’s emphasis on experiential learning. ACR students do learn in classrooms, but primarily on the shop floor. They practice skills using a virtual welder or virtual painter as well as auto parts, scrap vehicles, and eventually customer cars. Tate Westerman instructed the class that built the Smart Car. He considers the library an on-campus “end customer” and noted that this gave the students more accountability and investment in the quality of their work. For example, students normally practice their painting skills on scrap fenders that are later discarded. Working on something that would remain on display in the library provided “more of an audit

process, every time someone looked in the window, or opened and closed the door” (personal communication, December 5, 2019). Westerman noted that working on customer vehicles increases students’ motivation and work quality. The Smart Car had the added instructional value of the “potential for them to contribute to something that would actually stay in the college” (personal communication, December 5, 2019). ACR instructors have since referenced the car as an example of what the department teaches. The liaison librarian walks automotive students to the vehicle during their library orientation sessions, highlighting how their program is reflected in the library space. ACR faculty then point out specific elements to students, such as paint techniques or the Smart Car’s custom student-fabricated features. The number of ACR and AST library orientation tours rose during the Smart Car project and increased even more once the car was installed. This increased engagement aligns with external findings that library projects are more successful if they support wider institutional needs and goals (Bishoff et al., 2015; Farrell & Mastel, 2016).

Figure 2

The Smart Car in VCC Broadway Library



Note: Copyright 2019 by Annelle Harmer.

Event Planning and Lessons Learned

Library employees planned a Smart Car reveal party as a thank-you to ACR students, staff, and faculty. We also wanted to raise awareness of our new “study room” and provide a photo opportunity. Librarians used snacks and persistence to promote the

event. We had appealing food: cake, samosas, and cheesecake. We were also tenacious with our invitations: we short-listed a few dates and time slots with the relevant deans and instructors, then we finalized exactly which afternoon we would reveal the car. We sent calendar invitations to select ACR staff, faculty, and administrators, even following up with a few personal reminders. We invited college marketing. ACR faculty contacted alumni who had worked on the car and asked them to join us. VCC Vice President (Academic and Applied Research) David Wells gave the land acknowledgement, mentioning the specialized skills of autobody painters in his own Cree-Métis family. The library's dean, Shirley Lew, gave a heartfelt speech. One attendee asked ACR faculty about creating a similar project in the future for his organization. ACR students joined us, as did some staff and faculty from other college departments. An editor from *Collision Quarterly* came to interview ACR faculty and students. She also photographed the event and published an article about the project in the Winter 2019 issue. We consider the event a success: it raised awareness of VCC Libraries within the college, and it promoted the ACR programs to external organizations through the write-up in a national trade magazine for the collision repair industry. VCC librarians are pleased with the event turnout and with the student work displayed in the library. We have learned from our success, but there are definitely things we will do differently with future projects.

The car rebuild and subsequent event planning provided reminders about some essential elements of project planning. Communication was strong in many areas but had a few gaps in others. In particular, both the Smart Car project and the associated event planning would have been easier with stronger internal tracking. Due to librarian leaves and overlapping vacations, a clear progress-monitoring system would have made the whole process much smoother. Better project tracking would have allowed us to check what other librarians had communicated to project partners outside of the library and which tasks we had already completed. Project tracking is helpful even when details seem small. It is important for things like adhering to catering deadlines and keeping track of responses to event invitations.

We have also learned about the value of timeliness and instructional department involvement in library social media campaigns. We launched a VCC Library Car (#VCCLibraryCar #VCCLibrary) Instagram contest a few weeks after the Smart Car reveal party. We did have some brilliant entries, but participation was quite low. We believe we would have had more entrants if we had started the contest earlier. The Smart Car installation would have been an ideal time to launch the contest. A whole class and two faculty members moved the car around the external perimeter of the campus to get the car from the automotive shop to the library. One faculty member steered while many students pushed. Students were laughing and smiling throughout, with a lot of huffing and sighing for the final two uphill blocks. They were photographing and videotaping the car, each other, and their instructors. A month later, launch party guests took lots of pictures and recorded many videos; this would have been another excellent opportunity to launch the Instagram contest. VCC Marketing was there, including a professional photographer who created a Flickr album of the event (VCC, 2019). Yet we missed all of this brilliant content, and an opportunity to enlist the college's marketing department in the contest, by not beginning the social media

campaign for two additional weeks. Students only began entering once their instructors started encouraging them to do so. Moreover, although we had considered the entry process to be straightforward, many students did not understand how to enter. This experience left us with these lessons: immediately begin and promote any future social media campaigns at events, particularly if other departments are present, and keep everything as simple as possible; do not rely on students to come into the library to photograph a static display, no matter how interesting or unusual.

A maintenance plan is another important consideration for any display partnership. The jewelry and fashion programs are responsible for managing their materials; they agreed to this before they set up their first displays. When they have new items for the mannequins or the display case, they come in and change them without involving library staff. They replace the clothing and jewelry, post photos to their departmental Instagram accounts, and tag the library. Meanwhile, the car is intended as a permanent fixture. We can move it within the library, but it will not receive updating like the fashion and jewelry displays. However, it has already needed some maintenance, so an ACR faculty member came into the library to do a minor repair after a librarian requested it. This repair was based on an individual's generosity with his time, as we had not had a formal discussion about maintenance before installing the vehicle. The project has also created a small amount of extra work for library employees. One tire became deflated, so a reference assistant re-inflated it with a bicycle pump. Every morning, library staff plug in the car when they open the library and unplug it when they close. We added Christmas lights for December, so opening and closing staff also turned those on and off. Thus the car's updating and maintenance has been a bit *ad hoc*. It relies on the generosity of individual experts and ongoing adjustments to library procedures. Project maintenance and staff workflow adjustments are a possibility for projects like this, so it is important to try to anticipate and discuss potential issues and maintenance.

There were also lessons that will help the ACR program with future projects. ACR instructor Tate Westerman noted that "now that we've done one, I know we have it in us." He is pleased with the quality and finish of the vehicle, but he plans to make future projects even "more challenging, take it past a conventional vehicle," with "more creative ideas from students" (personal communication, December 5, 2019). Faculty in the ACR department enjoyed partnering with another department and hope to work on other collaborative projects in the future.

Conclusion

The typography, drafting, jewelry, fashion, and hair displays at VCC show off student work while making the library more visually interesting. The ACR creations also bring colour to the library. In addition, the Smart Car provides a space for conversation and study. All of these projects contribute to VCC's institutional vision of experiential learning.

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