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# Piloting a Library-Led Online Academic Skills Orientation Program

## Pilotage d'un programme d'orientation en ligne sur les compétences académiques dirigé par une bibliothèque

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article décrit un projet pilote déroulé en août 2021 du programme JumpStart Your Learning, un programme d'orientation en ligne sur les compétences académiques dirigé par la bibliothèque et offert aux nouveaux étudiants de premier cycle et des cycles supérieurs. Le projet pilote comprenait une série d'activités synchrones y compris des ateliers, des discussions entre experts et des périodes de questions, le tout offert sur une période de quatre jours fournissant aux étudiants une chance d'apprendre de spécialistes de l'apprentissage, de bibliothécaires, de mentors pairs, de professeurs, de conseillers académiques et d'autres partenaires du campus. Le projet pilote a été suivi par 548 étudiants, avec un total de 1310 participants aux ateliers et aux groupes de discussion. Cet article donne un aperçu de l'inspiration pour le projet pilote, fournit une réflexion sur la planification et la logistique d'événement, décrit les sujets abordés pendant l'événement et discute des leçons tirées du projet en 2021 pour informer celui offert en ligne et en personne en 2022. L'article termine avec des recommandations à l'intention d'autres professionnels des bibliothèques souhaitant mettre en place un programme d'orientation similaire et les encourage à réfléchir à la manière dont les bibliothèques peuvent jouer un rôle de premier plan dans le soutien à la transition étudiante et à l'acculturation au milieu universitaire si un tel programme n'est pas encore en place dans leurs institutions.

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## Piloting a Library-Led Online Academic Skills Orientation Program

## Pilotage d'un programme d'orientation en ligne sur les compétences académiques dirigé par une bibliothèque

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

This article describes the pilot of a program called JumpStart Your Learning, a library-led, pre-entry, online academic skills orientation for incoming undergraduate and graduate students conducted in August 2021. The pilot featured a range of synchronous online workshops, panel discussions, and “Ask Me Anything” sessions over a four-day period, which provided students an opportunity to learn from learning specialists, librarians, peer mentors, professors, academic advisors, and other campus partners. The pilot was attended by 548 unique students with overall workshop and panel attendance totaling 1310. The article provides insight into the inspiration for the pilot, reflects on event planning and logistics, describes the topics covered during the event, and discusses how lessons learned from the 2021 program informed the planning

process of the 2022 program, which included both online and in-person elements. The article concludes with recommendations for other library professionals who are interested in undertaking similar orientation programming and encourages them to reflect on how libraries can take a leading role in supporting student transition and academic acculturation if such programming is not currently in place at their institutions.

Cet article décrit un projet pilote déroulé en août 2021 du programme JumpStart Your Learning, un programme d'orientation en ligne sur les compétences académiques dirigé par la bibliothèque et offert aux nouveaux étudiants de premier cycle et des cycles supérieurs. Le projet pilote comprenait une série d'activités synchrones y compris des ateliers, des discussions entre experts et des périodes de questions, le tout offert sur une période de quatre jours fournissant aux étudiants une chance d'apprendre de spécialistes de l'apprentissage, de bibliothécaires, de mentors pairs, de professeurs, de conseillers académiques et d'autres partenaires du campus. Le projet pilote a été suivi par 548 étudiants, avec un total de 1310 participants aux ateliers et aux groupes de discussion. Cet article donne un aperçu de l'inspiration pour le projet pilote, fournit une réflexion sur la planification et la logistique d'événement, décrit les sujets abordés pendant l'événement et discute des leçons tirées du projet en 2021 pour informer celui offert en ligne et en personne en 2022. L'article termine avec des recommandations à l'intention d'autres professionnels des bibliothèques souhaitant mettre en place un programme d'orientation similaire et les encourage à réfléchir à la manière dont les bibliothèques peuvent jouer un rôle de premier plan dans le soutien à la transition étudiante et à l'acculturation au milieu universitaire si un tel programme n'est pas encore en place dans leurs institutions.

### ***Keywords / Mots-clés***

academic libraries, orientation, induction, transition, academic skills, university preparedness

bibliothèques universitaires, orientation, insertion, transition, compétences académiques, préparation à l'université

### ***Introduction***

How can university libraries help prepare incoming students for the rigors of a new academic program? This question was fundamental to the development of JumpStart Your Learning, an online academic skills pre-entry orientation program that was piloted in August 2021 at the University of Saskatchewan (USask), a U15 institution in western Canada. This pilot was influenced by three factors. First, while there are existing pre-entry and orientation programs in place at our university, they traditionally do not explicitly address academic skill development. Instead, the pre-entry program, UStart, serves as a general introduction to available student services, focusing primarily on the logistics of registration and guiding students through the administrative steps they must take before the term begins. The orientation activities that occur in the first few days of classes each fall are similarly focused on logistics and administration, specific to the

student's chosen college and its various processes. There is also a centrally coordinated information fair, with activities designed to orient students to the campus as a space, not the academic experience, and that connects them with student services staff and student groups. The second factor influencing the pilot program was related to the existing work of the library. Our library houses a range of graduate and undergraduate student supports (e.g., research, writing, study, and math help) so we decided we could leverage this in-house expertise to organize and facilitate an orientation event dedicated to academic skill development. Third, as our library was already in a process of change due to the ongoing disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, piloting a pre-entry online orientation program, slotted between the pre-entry and orientation activities mentioned above, seemed like a natural extension of the work we had undertaken in the previous year to pivot supports and services online.

This article begins with a brief literature review that situates the pilot within the larger landscape of online orientations, then describes event planning and logistics, and discusses how a revised 2022 program was developed based on our experiences of the previous year. We conclude by reflecting on the challenges of undertaking a new program and provide suggestions and encouragement for other library professionals who may wish to develop similar programming at their institutions.

## ***Literature Review***

Academic orientation and transition programming (also referred to as induction) is intended to ease students into a new and complex academic and social environment. Such initiatives encompass everything from summer bridging programs to Welcome Week activities to assorted workshops and events throughout the academic year. While orientation efforts often heavily focus on the first few weeks (Beras, 2018), transition is a process that occurs throughout the student lifecycle (Lizzio, 2011). Consequently, some institutions extend the induction runway so that students can more readily assimilate a range of new information and processes without becoming overwhelmed (Harvey et al., 2006), whether foregrounding pre-matriculation activities or embedding programming throughout the first year. Successful transition and orientation programming helps students feel a sense of belonging or "fit" (Cooper, 2021; Prasad et al., 2017), and provides opportunities for students to understand the norms, values, and expectations of university life (Schuster, 2019), including academic standards. Much has been written about the value of such programming, especially its influence on student retention (Harvey et al., 2006; Mann, 1998). Given this importance, it is unsurprising that libraries are often a critical component of induction, whether as an independent presence or via collaborations with campus partners. However, the degree to which libraries are involved in campuswide activities may be dependent on broader patterns of campus collaboration, ownership and funding for campus-wide orientation and transition programming, as well as an individual library's mandate. Regardless of such wider involvement, libraries have long developed their own library-specific orientation programming.

Library orientation is strategic, given that new undergraduate students may not fully understand the relevance of the library to their new lives and future academic success (Barefoot, 2006). Developing such student awareness is doubly important when a library also houses or administers the supports that, at other institutions, may be found in separate student success or academic learning centres, as students may not naturally associate the library with such a breadth of services (e.g., writing, study, or math help). Likewise, graduate students may not have made much use of the library when completing their previous degree(s) (whether at the same or a different institution), or they may be unaware of the specialized supports and services that are available (e.g., data management, scholarly communication) to help them succeed in graduate school (Ince, 2018); such gaps of knowledge may be greater for international graduate students depending on the nature of library services in their country of origin (Cooper & Hughes, 2017; Ruswick, 2011). Consequently, it is in a library's best interest to be proactively involved in induction programming so that students can develop awareness of how these institutions can help them meet their academic, research, and—to an extent—professional goals as they progress through their degree, especially when these outcomes are featured in a library's strategic plan (Saunders, 2016). Pre-pandemic, such programming took many forms, including in-person tours or scavenger hunts (Goldman et al., 2016; Rod-Welch, 2017), structured open houses (Behler et al., 2018), info/fun fairs (Mathuews & Lewis, 2017), games (Ingalls, 2015; Tang, 2021), social media (Hagman, 2018), synchronous or asynchronous online tutorials (Townsend, 2018), in-class sessions, guest spots (e.g., orientation talks, panels), and more.

While online orientation programming has been part of the post-secondary landscape for several decades, especially as part of distance education, the Covid-19 pandemic brought renewed attention to this mode of induction. Pre-pandemic, online learning orientation was increasingly used to induct students who were starting online degrees, programs, or courses (Taylor et al., 2015). Orientation efforts are made more pressing by the higher documented rates of drop-out among online learners compared with traditional in-person learners, with orientation helping to mitigate this trend (Marshall, 2017). The nature and content of such orientations, however, can greatly differ from institution to institution, reflecting a piecemeal approach to online student orientation (Garivaldis et al., 2022). As well, these programs may focus primarily on computer skills or the functionality of the institution's Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle) rather than the broader academic skills and strategies essential to post-secondary success. One recommendation to improve student retention in online courses that surfaced in a 2019 systematic review was the implementation of early interventions (i.e., orientations) that emphasize the role of effective learning and study strategies and personal and time management to help students become more successful online learners (Muljana & Luo). Indeed, there is evidence indicating that comprehensive online orientations can improve online learners' confidence and academic self-efficacy (Abdous, 2019). Apart from supporting online and distance students, some institutions also leveraged online programming before the pandemic to lengthen the induction period in advance of traditional in-person orientation programming, such as Welcome Week. Naturally, many university libraries also featured

orientation materials or modules on their websites or as embedded course material to help students learn about this essential campus resource, at times in response to poor in-person orientation attendance (Ingalls, 2015; Raish & Behler, 2019).

The rapid pivot to emergency remote teaching in March 2020 at many institutions, however, meant that the orientation modality would be reimagined as never before. Students who previously would not have attended university as an online or distance learner would now be required to do so, whether as part of starting, progressing, or completing their studies, during a time when few institutions were prepared to offer a fully immersive online learning experience. While we know that libraries updated their own orientation programming (Kretz et al., 2021; Schilperoort et al., 2022) what remains less clear is the degree to which libraries were involved in campuswide online orientation programs that emerged because of the pandemic. A cursory scan of institutional websites revealed that online orientation was the norm in North America in 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 in keeping with the wider trend of online-only teaching and learning that stemmed from pandemic-related shutdowns. Such initiatives varied from open synchronous presentations conducted over Zoom to asynchronous modules to password-protected Canvas and Brightspace courses. However, to date, there is limited scholarly literature on these online orientation programs or the role of the library in helping to initiate or facilitate such programming. Consequently, the reporting of our pilot project partially addresses this gap and helps answer the question: How can university libraries help prepare incoming students for the rigors of a new academic program?

## **Background**

USask is a public university in western Canada, and the main campus is situated in Saskatoon, the most populous city in the province. The university serves approximately 19,000 undergraduate students and 3,500 graduate students and houses multiple professional colleges, including medicine and education (University of Saskatchewan, 2022). Following a merger with the University Learning Centre in May 2015, the library became responsible for an array of student learning supports beyond research skill development and now administers such services as writing and math help, learning communities, and transition support. The library also has a program of outreach activities, including sessions for local high school students in the International Baccalaureate program. Given the depth and breadth of our existing programming, as well as a willingness to pilot new online initiatives in the face of a global pandemic, the launch of JumpStart Your Learning was a natural next step.

The name JumpStart is used by many post-secondary institutions in North America to describe a variety of transition initiatives that help incoming students adjust to the academic demands of university. Most JumpStart programming typically focuses on helping students navigate the shift from high school to undergraduate study (e.g., [UBC](#), [University of Toledo](#)) with some universities also including guardians of first-year undergraduate students as part of the program scope. For instance, on their JumpStart sites, both [Toronto Metropolitan University](#) and [Capilano University](#) explicitly identify parents and supporters as potential program participants. In contrast, the name

JumpStart is used less frequently when referring to graduate orientations (some exceptions being [The University of New Mexico](#) and [The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Social Work](#)). Our JumpStart programming is distinct in that it encompasses both undergraduate and graduate students. This design is reflective of our library's dual focus, given that we support both groups equally, as well as the large number of international graduate students who study at our university. These incoming students must adjust not only to the demands of graduate work but also to a new teaching and learning culture, a two-pronged academic acculturation.

Our JumpStart programming reflects an understanding of the student lifecycle. Preceding our Smart Start programming, which traditionally focuses on the first two months of the fall term, JumpStart consists of a wide variety of in-person workshops facilitated by peer mentors or professional staff (e.g., librarians, learning specialists) and is marketed to all students, regardless of level of study. Originally, programming under the banner "JumpStart Your Learning" started with a series of free, in-person, 2.5-hour workshops in 2019 that ran in late August and early September. Prior to the pandemic, a redesign of JumpStart was proposed that would structure the event like a conference, enabling students to move among concurrently run sessions for a more personalized preorientation and transition experience. However, before such an approach could be introduced, our university, like many others, became temporarily remote due to the public health threat of Covid-19, with most classes, services, and supports running completely online in the 2020/2021 academic year. Consequently, JumpStart planning was delayed as we worked to move our wide range of supports and services online for Fall 2020. However, as we approached Fall 2021, our attention returned to an academic skills transition program that could be run exclusively online.

## ***JumpStart Your Learning: An Online Academic Skills Pre-entry Program***

### **Purpose**

We were inspired by several factors when approaching the design and launch of this program. First, the pilot was intended to address a service gap within the university's broader orientation programming. As previously noted, existing orientation programming at our institution does not traditionally focus on academic skill development; rather, its primary purpose is to convert student acceptances into student registrations by ensuring that students have sufficient information to navigate the registration process and, for interested students, to reserve rooms in residence. In contrast, the library has a broader mandate around student transition, focusing on academic skills development throughout the student lifecycle: *transition toward, transition in, transition through, and transition out*, modelled on Lizzio's (2011) student lifecycle. Consequently, by coordinating efforts with campus partners, we aimed to position our library-led pilot as an integrated part of a more comprehensive, personalized, and longer orientation experience. Second, the pilot was intended to gauge interest in an academic skills-focused orientation event. While similar programs have been implemented (whether in-person or online) in other post-secondary institutions for several years, it was unclear whether our student body

would respond to such an initiative due to demographic differences. Third, we wanted to improve student awareness of the library as a destination for academic skills supports, as incoming students often have limited understanding of how the library can help them succeed in their program of study. Finally, we wanted to create an experience for students to build their confidence about starting a new program, especially following widespread disruptions due to the pandemic, which may have left some students feeling underprepared for university studies, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level.

## **Event Planning and Delivery**

While there had been earlier discussions within our division about the desire to launch an online pre-entry program, planning began in earnest in May 2021 and was led by a team of three: two learning specialists and a program assistant. Given the short timeline, we began reaching out to a limited number of library staff, faculty, and peer mentors as well as campus partners to gauge interest and availability to participate as presenters, facilitators, or moderators. We were especially keen to have a professors' panel, so that attendees could hear directly from instructors about university expectations as well as the instructors' own experiences as first-year students. In addition to securing the participation of several instructors, we had an enthusiastic response from Career Services, which arranged to have a representative participate at multiple points throughout the event. Students could also attend academic advisor panels, which featured advisors from multiple colleges. We hosted various "Ask Me Anything" sessions, whereby students could chat directly with learning specialists, librarians, and undergraduate and graduate peer mentors. To help manage the workload, many of our interactive workshops were built on existing core workshops that could be repackaged for the event. Some new workshops were also proposed and created by team members and partners.

Despite the ambitious scope of the four-day pilot, it was largely developed as a side project and received no dedicated funding. Instead, we relied on in-house expertise to design the registration system (LibCal), collaborated with campus partners to disseminate information to incoming students, and arranged to have most sessions developed, moderated, and facilitated by library staff and peer mentors. As part of our planning process, we also consulted with our university's research ethics board about the content and design of the program survey and received an exemption to share results beyond our institution. Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

The event was promoted through several channels, including the new student orientation website, a direct email to incoming students (sent by one of our campus partners), a library [news article](#), an Instagram post and a Facebook post on the official university accounts, and a digital poster released by the graduate college. For a sampling of these materials, refer to Appendix B.

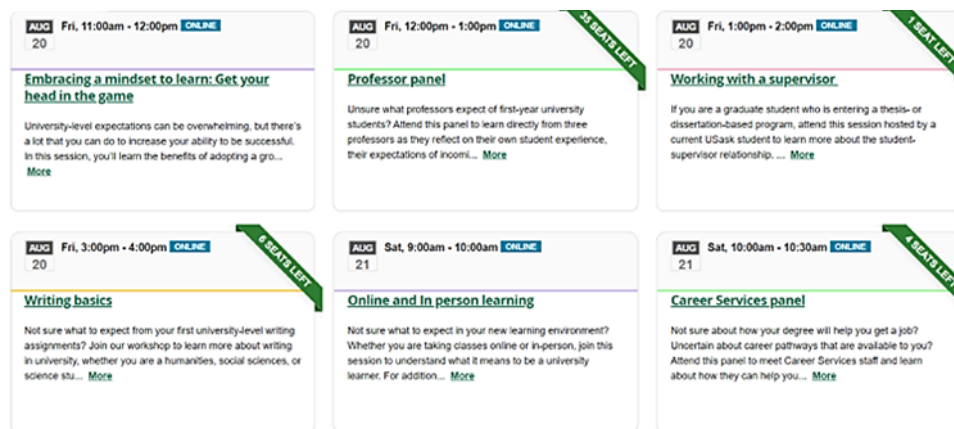
We used LibCal, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams to run the event. LibCal was the registration system. This created a user-friendly interface and allowed students to register for individual events (see Figure 1 for a screen capture). This platform also



included information about registration limits, theoretically creating a sense of urgency and value as students could quickly see how many spaces were left (e.g., 21 seats remaining). All sessions were facilitated over Zoom, which meant that polls could be created in advance of workshops, allowing for more interaction during the sessions. Lastly, we used Microsoft Teams to communicate among ourselves throughout the event (e.g., to request technical assistance, to share anecdotes, to report preliminary attendance numbers).

**Figure 1**

*Screen capture of the LibCal registration system*



As part of the pilot's design, we were mindful of access concerns, especially time zone issues, as we anticipated that many attendees would be international students. For instance, morning sessions running between 8am and 11am could be reasonably attended by students based in places like Brazil, India, Iran, Nigeria, and Ghana, while evening sessions held between 6pm and 8pm would be manageable for students based in China. We were also aware that some students would have job or personal responsibilities, so having a range of programming available throughout the day would be critical to accommodate students. Of course, we also needed to work with the availability of presenters and moderators, most of whom were in the same time zone as the university. Lastly, we wanted to be mindful of potential attrition as the program progressed, so the first two days featured longer days, whereas programming ended earlier on Friday and Saturday. Attendees were encouraged to engage in as many or as few sessions as they liked, and some sessions were offered more than once for additional flexibility and to help build out the schedule. For a schedule overview, refer to Appendix C.

We tried to schedule most graduate-specific programming the first day, shared programming the second day, and undergraduate-specific programming the third and fourth days, with the thought that this would reduce the need for students to participate in all four days and consequently increase engagement, given what is well documented about the challenges of having students attend and engage in non-credit library

workshops (Fong et al., 2016; Witherspoon & Taber, 2021). However, this plan was compromised by the limited availability of some presenters, including peer mentors, so the schedule had to be adjusted to accommodate partners and volunteers.

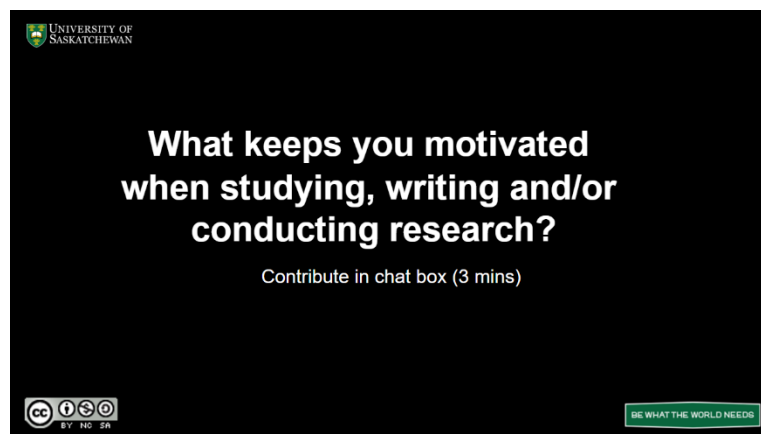
Shared programming included events like the Career Services and academic advisor presentations and “Ask Me Anything” sessions while more targeted programming for each student group (undergraduate vs. graduate) included topics related to research, writing, study and note-taking skills, and preparedness. For a complete list of session titles, refer to Appendix D.

## **Research**

Research sessions targeted graduate students more than undergraduate students. We had sessions on research data management and using the library as a graduate student, which included information on research and publication supports while an undergraduate-focused library session included guidance on navigating the library website and choosing appropriate search tools. The graduate-focused sessions were facilitated by librarians and learning specialists whereas the undergraduate-focused session was facilitated by a program assistant who regularly conducts orientation sessions for new students. These sessions were structured as a formal presentation with interactive elements (i.e., Zoom polls, chat prompts). For a sample prompt, see Figure 2 which features a slide from *Making the Most of the Library: Recommendations for Graduate Students*.

## **Figure 2**

*Screen capture of a discussion prompt from an online presentation*



## **Writing**

Writing sessions for graduate and undergraduate students involved breaking down undergraduate- and graduate-level expectations, reflecting on current writing habits and attitudes, and identifying relevant library supports and services, including the Writing Help Centre. The graduate session was facilitated by a learning specialist who supports graduate writers whereas the undergraduate sessions were co-facilitated by the

coordinator of the Writing Help Centre and a writing tutor. These sessions were structured as a formal presentation with interactive elements (i.e., Zoom polls, chat prompts).

### ***Studying and Note-Taking***

We had separate sessions on reading and note-taking in graduate and undergraduate programs as well as an undergraduate-level session on study strategies. These sessions were primarily facilitated by trained peer mentors and structured as a formal presentation with interactive elements (i.e., Zoom polls, chat prompts).

### ***Preparedness***

Transition and preparedness sessions dominated the design of the event, given that new students may feel nervous or are keen to gain insider knowledge about being successful at university. Sessions focused on topics like time management, online and in-person learning, growth mindset, and working with supervisors and professors. These sessions were typically structured as a formal presentation with interactive elements (i.e., Zoom polls, chat prompts).

We also featured events that had less structure so that students could raise their most pressing questions, namely the “Ask Me Anything” sessions, which were modelled after the popular feature in Reddit. During these sessions, attendees could ask any questions they anticipated the featured person could answer. Participants had the choice of entering their questions via the chat or unmuting themselves. A moderator also helped manage the session by posting relevant links into the chat so that students could learn more about various campus supports, services, and resources that would answer their questions. “Ask Me Anything” sessions individually spotlighted librarians, learning specialists, and current university students.

Likewise, students could ask questions of academic advisors and Career Services representatives and learn more about these campus supports. Lastly, during a professor panel, students learned directly from a small group of instructors about the normal challenges and struggles of attending university, and students were invited to ask questions of participating instructors.

### **Evaluation and Reflection of the 2021 Program**

Due to the interactive nature of most sessions, attendance was initially capped at 50 registrants each. However, due to student demand, these caps were raised to 75 and later 100, as we were keen to accommodate as many students as possible. Based on typical library workshop attendance, we were also aware that registration numbers for free events often soften as the event date approaches, commonly dropping by more than half. However, in this instance, registration numbers and attendance numbers were more aligned. The most popular sessions were *Writing Basics* (78 attendees, with another 41 attending a second session), *Reading and Note Taking* (77 attendees),

*Professor Panel (72), Managing Your Time in University (74), Embracing a Mindset to Learn (70), Online and In-Person Learning (69), Making the Most of the Library: Recommendations for Graduate Students (68), Writing a Scholarship Proposal (67), Grad Writing and You: Strategies for Success (66), Study Strategies (65), and Research Data Management: What You Need to Know (63).* Other sessions had 20-45 attendees, averaging 32 students per session. Overall, the number of unique participants was 548 (excluding attendees who left sessions after less than 5 minutes), with overall workshop attendance totaling 1310. These numbers exceeded expectations, especially as our fall workshop attendance usually totals 1000-1500, meaning that we had as much engagement in four days as we typically experience in three months.

These sizeable numbers may have resulted from one or more possibilities. First, given feelings of instability resulting from the pandemic, it may have been that students were more apprehensive than normal about beginning a new academic program. For instance, many incoming undergraduate students had much of their final two years of high school continuously disrupted as schools repeatedly closed and opened, with classes being run online intermittently. Second, it may have been easy for students to engage with an online academic skills program. Theoretically, students could join from anywhere they had an internet connection, meaning that students could even join from their cellphones if needed. This ease of participation may have been appealing for many, as they could select the sessions that seemed most relevant and dedicate a small number of hours rather than an entire day to the process. As Wittek and Rust (2021) noted when reflecting on their own pandemic-motivated shift to online programming, the change in modality brought with it some unanticipated benefits, namely accessibility for students with disabilities and enhanced reach as place/space was no longer a barrier. Third, it may have been that students were responding to a general gap in the university's existing transition and orientation programming. It is normal for students to have unanswered questions or concerns about the university experience, whether as a new undergraduate or graduate student, and this program may have addressed this need. Meanwhile, the online pilot provided students an opportunity to hear from a range of peers and professionals about the challenges, opportunities, and expectations of university in a low-stakes environment.

We invited all 500+ unique participants to complete the optional program survey. Forty-five students responded, representing a response rate of approximately 8%. This low rate of response was one of the few disappointments of the pilot, given the total number of attendees and the high level of anecdotal student engagement during sessions that was recounted by facilitators and moderators. During sessions, students were quick to respond to questions (whether via the chat or by unmuting), raise their own questions, and offer spontaneous compliments and thanks to presenters as sessions ended (e.g., "this was awesome!", "thank you so much!"). However, given that there was no incentive for completing the survey, the low response rate becomes more understandable. Of the students who did complete the survey, almost all were uniformly positive in their comments. For instance, one student noted, "I have a better idea of how to succeed in University when it comes to managing my time, note taking and writing, which were things I struggled with in High School," while another commented, "The Professor Panel

was amazing to be a part of. I learned a lot from all of the workshops attended.” Moreover, given that most students attended at least two sessions, such behaviour suggests that students found value in the event; otherwise, they would not have continued to attend.

In reviewing registration and attendance information, we were surprised to discover that a sizeable minority of attendees were second-year students. The registration platform allowed for any student to register with their student ID and did not distinguish between new or returning students, nor did we think to introduce any exclusionary measures that would prevent returning students from attending. We speculated that these students attended the event due to the challenges of the previous year, when virtually all classes were delivered as “emergency remote” instruction (Saqlain, 2021). Another possibility was that returning students wanted to gain more insight into academic expectations and supports if they did not meet the academic goals they had set for themselves the previous year, which aligns with some of what is known about the success of bounce-back programs like [\*Thriving in Action\*](#) at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Meanwhile, despite best efforts to troubleshoot in advance of the event, we also faced some unexpected technology issues. Some students had a difficult time accessing their sessions on Zoom, which required on-the-spot problem solving and placed extra stress on one of our team members, who had to field many emails from students. We also discovered integration problems between LibCal and Zoom, which created some damaged links. Some of these issues were complicated by the university’s late adoption of Zoom, which was only introduced campuswide a few weeks before the start of the fall term. However, most of these issues were resolved by the end of the first day. We also had a few issues with internet connectivity, which at times meant that a moderator/co-host would need to improvise while the main presenter reconnected.

Apart from these technology and connectivity issues, we encountered some additional challenges. Some sessions proved livelier than others, which meant that a second moderator was sometimes needed to help manage the chat, while in other instances the facilitator needed to improvise to fill up the allotted time. We also encountered questions that were not directly answered by any of the sessions and instead emerged during the “Ask Me Anything” sessions or during Q&A in other sessions. Such questions clustered around concerns about study skills for students with ADHD, admissions, financial aid, registration, residence, bus passes, and textbooks. Indeed, questions about textbooks were numerous, at times reflecting students’ financial concerns (e.g., seeing textbooks as a burdensome expenditure to be avoided if possible). However, given that some university libraries outside of North America supply course textbooks (Ruswick, 2011), some international students may have been doubly concerned about the logistics of purchasing expensive texts. As Ruswick (2011) noted in her own assessment of an orientation event for international students, “our surveys showed an overwhelming number of [international] students were confused about where to get their textbooks, and procuring textbooks is one of the first things students take care of” (p. 28). Fortunately, while our facilitators and moderators may not have been able to answer

such questions directly, they were able to provide links to appropriate campus partners so that students could still find answers to their questions.

### ***Refining JumpStart Your Learning: August 2022***

Given the success of the 2021 online program, we decided to run it again in August 2022, with changes to reflect some of the lessons learned from the pilot.

By Winter 2022, more classes and supports were consistently being held in-person so as part of improving the program, we were keen to pilot an on-campus component (JumpStart Your Learning: Campus Day). In the same way that the 2021 program was meant to determine overall interest in an online academic skill-focused orientation, we wanted to gauge whether there would also be interest in an in-person academic orientation. This addition created another layer of complexity to our planning. To keep planning manageable, we decided to keep core components of the online program and adopted a truncated schedule of three days given the additional work that this new in-person component would involve. While bundled together for communication purposes, the two programs were quite distinct from each other, not just in terms of mode of delivery, but also in terms of the programming on offer. This was done intentionally to ensure that if students attended the online sessions, they would still have a unique experience if also attending the on-campus day program.

While the online program featured many of the same sessions that we ran in 2021, the proven success of the pilot made it easier to reach out to more campus partners, so we were able to offer a greater range and number of sessions, including presentations by Student Wellness and both student unions. Refer to Appendix D for a list of the topics that were offered each year. As the schedule was reduced by a day, comparable graduate and undergraduate programs were run during the same timeslots. We also reduced the number of duplicate sessions. While this may have affected the ability of some students to attend certain sessions, we needed to be cognizant of our limited people resources, especially as several online facilitators would also be involved in Campus Day, a full-day event. The increased number of unique sessions made finalizing the online schedule a bit challenging, but we found that the best approach was to schedule campus partners first and then arrange our team's workshops and presentations around their availability.

The experience of the previous year also meant that it was easier to anticipate certain student concerns (e.g., textbooks, bus passes), so we had information on hand to respond to those questions more quickly or to circumvent them altogether (e.g., by explaining what we could *not* answer at the start of an "Ask Me Anything" session). Likewise, we arranged for a session to be facilitated by Access and Equity Services and anticipated that questions about accommodations could be better captured by this facilitator. Ultimately, as with any live programming, we knew that some sessions would go more smoothly than others depending on the questions that students would bring into the (virtual) room. However, having the experience of the pilot meant that we were more confident about how the program would run.

We continued to use LibCal as our registration system for both the online and in-person programming and used Zoom for facilitating the online sessions. We encountered far fewer technology-related problems compared to the previous year, applying what we had learned from the pilot. Meanwhile, our communications were supplemented with [a new website](#) that featured student testimonials from the August 2021 pilot and links to a set of three self-guided online JumpStart modules; the page continues to be updated as part of ongoing JumpStart programming. The self-guided modules had first been envisioned in February 2020, but production was delayed due to the pandemic. The modules were designed by two of our unit's learning specialists and our instructional design specialist and were published between January and August 2021.

In 2022, approximately 309 unique students attended the online sessions, accounting for a total of 1084 total workshop attendees. Compared with the 2021 pilot, attendance did decrease (548 vs. 309 unique attendees; 1310 vs. 1084 total workshop attendance), but overall, the numbers remain comparable with several months of regular library workshop programming.

The five most popular sessions were *Intro to University-Level Writing I: Typical Challenges* (93 attendees), *Reading and Note-taking in University* (83), *Managing Your Time in University* (66), *Beyond the Lecture Hall: An Introduction to the University Community* (63), and *Intro to University-Level Writing II: Tools and Processes* (60).

When it came to planning the new in-person component, we were keen not to simply replicate the online programming. Campus Day was organized to foreground connection and experiential learning, so it featured many opportunities throughout the day for students to work with and get to know each other as part of their transition to a new learning environment. We also wanted to reiterate the value of library supports and services, so we held a concurrent library services info fair during morning registration to allow students to chat with representatives from Math & Stats Help, Writing Help, Study Skills Help, Research Services, and Borrower Services. During the morning session, students participated in collaborative drawing exercises and discussed perceptions of university life and learned about note-taking strategies. This exercise allowed them to connect with other incoming students in a fun way and provided the facilitators an opportunity to circulate and talk with students. After lunch, students attended mini-lectures delivered by two professors, during which they practiced their note-taking skills. Following a debrief of the lecture experience, students attended a student panel featuring peer mentors and representatives from the undergraduate student union. The final activity of the day was a case-study exercise, in which students collaboratively identified the appropriate campus supports that would address some of the typical problems that a first-year student may face. Afterwards, students could either undertake an optional self-directed tour of campus or speak one-to-one with the program facilitators about specific questions they had before starting classes (e.g., how to log into our Learning Management System). Refer to Appendix E for a schedule of the day.

Additional considerations for preparing for Campus Day included securing a budget for lunches and incidentals, working with campus partners to obtain swag for a draw (a hoodie was provided by the campus store), securing and setting up the space (including moving tables, setting up a portable projector), recruiting volunteers for the library info fair and for setup and takedown, booking guest lecturers, establishing a process for registration and photography (including the ability for students to opt out of having their photo taken), and soliciting student feedback.

We decided to administer a similar survey as we did for the pilot to gather feedback from both online and in-person participants, though in-person participants were asked some additional questions (e.g., whether they had attended any of the online programming). Campus Day participants were encouraged to use a QR code near the end of the day to complete the survey on site. Despite some technical glitches, having some dedicated time to complete the survey for in-person programming is recommended, as it seems to help with survey completion. One late change involved adding an incentive (a chance to win a \$25 gift card) with the hopes of securing a higher response rate than the previous year, especially for online-only participants, which notably increased the percentage of student responses. Though we did receive an exemption in 2021 that allowed us to share survey results with other institutions, the changes to this year's survey design were significant enough that we determined the survey data should be used only for internal programming and planning.

Campus Day was attended by 37 students out of a total of 60 registrations, representing approximately 62% follow-through. Surprisingly, we had two students who had not registered in advance who wanted to attend last minute. We were able to accommodate these students due to no-shows.

## ***Conclusion***

In reflecting on the original intent of the pilot, we deemed both iterations successful despite having a few challenges. We were able to effectively run an academic skills orientation that fit neatly into a larger orientation calendar to create a more comprehensive transition and orientation experience for students. The orientation programming at our institution exists as a side-of-desk responsibility for several staff from various departments. It is not currently operated out of a dedicated unit or department, as is common at other universities. Consequently, there was opportunity to take on this initiative without the risk of duplicating other campus efforts while simultaneously aligning ourselves as a driving force in a more coordinated and sustained campus-wide effort to orient our students throughout the summer and early fall. The success of the pilot made the library's role in orientation more visible, resulting in a closer relationship with campus partners. This development echoes Ruswick's (2011) observation that engagement with orientation events can help showcase the library as "cooperative, savvy, and helpful" (p. 26) and consequently build or deepen campus partnerships. Indeed, the success of the 2021 pilot made it easier to invite more campus partners to participate in the 2022 program.



Based on overall numbers, we are also confident that there is student interest in academic skills-based transition programming, whether online or in-person, and see our library as continuing to have a leading role in helping students feel more prepared in advance of their first class. However, what remains unknown is whether students perceived the library as a primary resource because of this pilot, as we saw little notable difference in subsequent workshop attendance numbers each fall. If anything, some workshop numbers in the Fall 2021 term were somewhat lower than in the previous year, a trend that continued into the Fall 2022 term. While this decline may be partially attributed to some overlap in content between JumpStart and fall offerings, reduced student engagement may also be attributed to growing Zoom fatigue as well as difficulties managing schedules in a post-Covid world. Another confounding variable could be changes to the library's online presence. Since 2020, we have created an [inventory of recorded workshops](#) and have [redesigned part of the library website](#), meaning that students may be finding the information they need more readily, without relying as much on synchronous workshops. Indeed, according to our analytics, the redesigned page is typically found to be one of the top ten (and often top five) of the most visited pages on the entire library website.

Perhaps of most interest to other library professionals who are considering piloting a similar initiative at their institutions was the low cost of the event. As noted previously, we received no dedicated funding for the 2021 orientation. The only costs that we accrued were for thank-you cards and modest gifts for non-library staff or faculty, and these costs were covered by existing orientation programming funds. In 2022, the budget for the online portion increased only enough to cover the modest cost of some gift cards that were purchased to try and increase survey completion rates. Unsurprisingly, incentives can be an effective way to increase response rates (Laguilles et al., 2011), and they certainly helped improve our survey completion in 2022. The largest expense was catering lunch for students, facilitators and volunteers and paying for supplies for the Campus Day event. Ultimately, the main cost was the number of hours that went into planning and later facilitating the event; however, having a high functioning, if small, team meant that we were able to make quick decisions and launch the pilot within a few months. While the team grew slightly in 2022, the core team from 2021 was still responsible for most of the planning and facilitating. Also crucial to the success of the 2021 pilot and the 2022 program was the willingness of campus partners to participate at a time when many people are either on vacation or preparing for the fall term. This involvement was especially remarkable given the unknown appeal of such an initiative.

## ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations identify key considerations for those who are interested in undertaking a new academic skills orientation for incoming undergraduate and/or graduate students:

- Conduct an environmental scan of the institution to determine current orientation programming for incoming students to avoid replicating existing efforts.

- If orientation programming is identified, consider how the library can or should be involved in existing efforts, and reach out to organizers with clear suggestions for involvement.
- If little or no orientation programming is identified, determine the library's capacity to undertake a new program (i.e., staff availability, funds) and establish a planning team.
- Determine whether the orientation program will be exclusively online or contain in-person elements.
- Consider how to address accessibility concerns (e.g., time zone differences) as well as potential "Zoom fatigue." A good gauge will be the mode by which students are currently engaging in library programming. Keep in mind that incoming students may be highly invested in learning about their new school, regardless of mode of programming.
- Determine how existing library programming can be repurposed for the event to make the planning more manageable.
- Reach out to campus partners to help share the work of undertaking a comprehensive academic skills-focused orientation program, including the institution's communications unit for support with advertising the event.
- Identify program outcomes and how the success of the program will be assessed to allow for a streamlined reflection process and to determine if the program will be repeated in future years.

## ***Acknowledgements***

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## Appendix A

Table 1: JumpStart Participant Survey

<p>JumpStart Participant Survey (August 2021)</p> <p>Thank you for participating in this year's virtual JumpStart Orientation. To help us plan next year's event, please complete the following survey. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.</p> <p>I am ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· An undergraduate student</li><li>· A graduate student</li></ul> <p>I am enrolled in ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· [choose from list of colleges]</li></ul> <p>I attended sessions on ... (check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Wed., 18 Aug 2021</li><li>· Thurs., 19 Aug 2021</li><li>· Fri., 20 Aug 2021</li><li>· Sat., 21 Aug 2021</li></ul> <p>I attended the following events (check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· [choose from list of all sessions]</li></ul> <p>What inspired you to attend JumpStart? (check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Wanted to become familiar with different campus supports and services</li><li>· Sessions seemed useful based on descriptions/titles</li><li>· Wanted to gain an advantage before starting the term</li><li>· Nervous about meeting university or course expectations</li><li>· Wanted insight into being a [institution's name] student</li><li>· Recommended by university (professor, college, staff member)</li><li>· Recommended by peer</li><li>· Other</li></ul> <p>From your perspective, what was the most useful or memorable part of the event?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· [open-ended response]</li></ul> <p>After attending the event, do you feel more prepared for the Fall term?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· I feel more prepared for the start of classes</li><li>· I feel slightly more prepared for the start of classes</li><li>· I feel no more or no more less prepared for the start of classes</li></ul>
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- I feel less prepared for the start of classes

After attending the event, how likely are you to use Library services and supports in the Fall term?

- I am very likely to use Library supports and services this Fall
- I am likely to use Library supports and services this Fall
- I am somewhat likely to use Library supports and services this Fall
- I am unlikely to use Library supports and services this Fall

Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?

- Highly satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not satisfied

Would you recommend that new [university] students attend JumpStart Orientation?

- Yes, highly recommended
- Yes, recommended
- Yes, somewhat recommended
- No, not recommended

What recommendation(s) do you have for improving the event?

- [open-ended response]

What format would you suggest for future orientation events?

- Online only
- In-person only
- Mix of online and in-person events

I give permission for my responses to be used for promotion of future Library events, including next year's JumpStart Orientation.

- Yes
- No

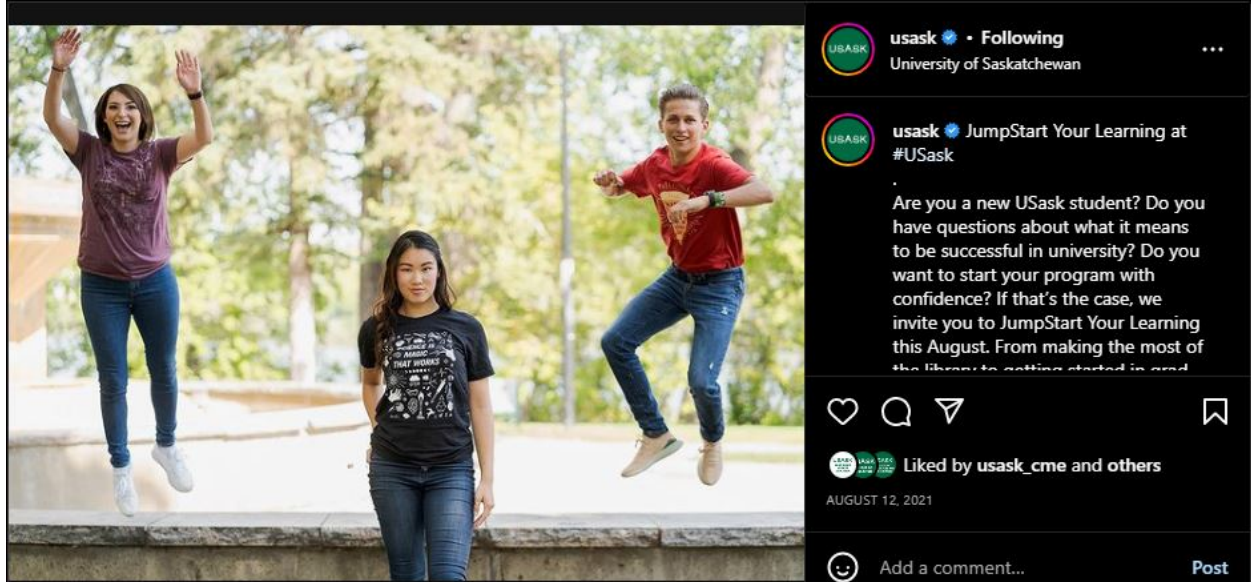
I give permission for my responses to be used for research and sharing purposes (e.g., reporting at a conference). Please note that all responses are anonymous and cannot be traced back to the person who filled out the survey.

- Yes
- No

## Appendix B

### Marketing and Communication Materials: A Sampling

#### Instagram post



University of Saskatchewan [@usask]. (2021, August 12). “JumpStart your learning at #USask” [Photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSe1FWzLsaT/>

#### Facebook post



University of Saskatchewan. (2021, August 21). JumpStart your learning at #USask. [Status Update]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/usask/photos/a.10150097055949597/10159229813404597/>



## Appendix C

Table 2: 2021 program schedule

	18 Aug 2021	19 Aug 2021		20 Aug 2021	21 Aug 2021	
8-9am	Making the most of the library: Recommendations for graduate students			Welcome to your library!		
9-10am				Managing your time in university (Undergrads)	Online and in person learning	
10-11am	Career Services panel [10-10:30am]	Advisor panel	Reading and note taking (Undergrads)	Career Services panel [10-10:30am]	Career Services panel [10-10:30am]	Ask Me Anything session: Ft. learning specialist [10:30-11:30 am]
11-12pm	Research data management: What you need to know	Study strategies for academic success		Embracing a mindset to learn: Get your head in the game	Ask Me Anything session: Ft. recent undergraduate student [11:30-12:30pm]	
12-1pm		Ask Me Anything session: Ft. graduate student		Professor panel		
1-2pm		Writing a scholarship proposal (Grad students) [1:30-2:30pm]		Working with a supervisor (Grad students)	Ask Me Anything session: Ft. librarian	
2-3pm	Note taking in graduate school	Writing basics [2:30-3:30pm]				
3-4pm				Writing basics		
4-5pm	Getting started in graduate school	Career Services panel [4-4:30pm]	Advisor panel [4:30-5:30 pm]			
6-7pm	Grad writing and you: Strategies for success					
7-8pm		Ask Me Anything session: Ft. undergrad student				

**Appendix D***Table 3: Comparison of online session titles in 2021 and 2022*

August 2021	August 2022
Academic advisors panel	Academic advisors panel
Professor panel	Professor panel
Career services introduction	Career services introduction
	Undergraduate Students' Union info session
	Graduate Students' Association info session
	Access and Equity Services
	Wellness presentation
I'm a current undergraduate student: Ask me anything	I'm a current undergraduate student: Ask me anything
I'm a current graduate student: Ask me anything	I'm a current graduate student: Ask me anything
I'm a learning specialist: Ask me anything	I'm a learning specialist: Ask me anything
I'm a librarian: Ask me anything	I'm a librarian: Ask me anything
Welcome to your library	Welcome to your library
Making the most of the library (graduate students)	Making the most of the library (graduate students)

Embracing a mindset to learn: Get your head in the game	Embracing a mindset to learn: Get your head in the game
Managing your time in university	Managing your time in university
Reading and note-taking in university (undergraduate students)	Reading and note-taking in university (undergraduate students)
Study strategies for academic success	Study strategies for academic success
Online and in-person learning	Remote and online learning
	University learning
	Beyond the lecture hall: An introduction to the university community
	Introduction to the university research community
Writing basics	Intro to university-level writing I: Typical challenges
	Intro to university-level writing II: Tools and processes
	Intro to university-level writing III: Practice and feedback
Grad writing and you: Strategies for success	Grad writing and you: Strategies for success
Writing a scholarship proposal (graduate students)	Writing a scholarship proposal (graduate students)
	Scholarships are for everyone (undergraduate students)

Working with a supervisor (graduate students)	Working with a supervisor (graduate students)
Research data management: What you need to know	Research data management: What you need to know
Note-taking in graduate school	Reading and note-taking in grad school
	Getting started in grad school
	Managing grad level procrastination

## **Appendix E**

*Table 4: Schedule of Campus Day activities*

10:00am	Registration & Library Info Fair
11:00am	Welcome/Icebreaker activity
11:30am	Note-taking lecture
12:00pm	Lunch
1:00pm	Lecture (featuring USask professors)
1:30pm	Debrief of note-taking experience
2:00pm	Ask Me Anything panel (featuring USask students)
3:00pm	Case study exercises
4:00pm	Optional self-directed tour