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## Pierce Library's Night Against Procrastination

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# Pierce Library's Night Against Procrastination

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There is a reason we are probably all familiar with the term “all-nighter,” whether we work in academia or elsewhere. The tendency to procrastinate is so common; most of us are likely to have had the experience of writing a paper late into the night before it is due or making a last-ditch attempt to learn concepts the night before a final exam. There are many strategies for dealing with, preventing, or avoiding procrastination, but a group of students and tutors at the European University Viadrina (EUV) in Frankfurt/Oder, Germany, came up with a novel twist on the traditional all-nighter, turning it into a strategy instead of a last resort (Datig & Herkner, 2014).

Suggested by these students, the “Long Night Against Procrastination” originated through a Writing Center-Library collaboration at EUV, and many libraries in the U.S. and abroad have adopted the model (Landgraf, 2014). The general philosophy is that students pull the all-nighter before the last minute, getting on top of assignments and out in front of exams. The events are filled with organized study breaks, activities, food, and other incentives to participate, and they present an opportunity to build goodwill between students and library staff.

Eastern Oregon University’s Writing Center planned and held EOU’s first Night Against Procrastination, or NAP, in collaboration with the Learning Center (tutor services) in Winter 2016. The event ran from 5:00 p.m. on a Friday until 2:00 a.m. on Saturday, and it featured games and activities organized by tutors every 45 minutes, pizza at 6:00 p.m., and pancakes at midnight. When the second NAP event was held in the Learning Center the following year, librarians asked to participate, and two reference librarians from Pierce Library offered research assistance alongside tutors.



## Planning

Being involved in the event planning gave library staff valuable information for planning our own NAP event in the Spring term of 2017, which we considered our pilot program. Running the pilot during Spring when our workload is lighter and when we have fewer students on campus and in the library set us up nicely to hold a larger NAP event in the Fall. We were able to work out some kinks to make the Fall event highly successful.

EOU is a small rural, public university in La Grande, Oregon, with about 1,300 on-campus students. Pierce Library has a staff of 13. We kept our planning committee relatively small for greater efficiency, with three librarians and two classified staff members from Public Services. Because of the information that the Writing Center and Learning Center had shared with us from running their NAP event and our own pilot, we were able to keep planning meetings to a minimum. We divided the labor so that one person was responsible for marketing, another for shopping for supplies, and so forth. I handled liaising with outside entities and coordinating the planning committee. We had a budget of \$300 for food and supplies.

We held the NAP in Pierce Library on the Sunday preceding Week 5 (of a ten-week term) which is when midterms are commonly held. Sundays tend to be busier nights for us, so we could be assured students would already be in the building even if few came intentionally for the event. We decided to run the event from 5:00 p.m. to midnight in consideration of Monday morning classes and our own work schedules.

We printed programs and left them around the library in various student work areas before the library opened. The programs described the event, explained how prize drawings would be conducted, and listed the activities that would occur throughout the night. We also had a host at the door, our evening circulation supervisor Mackenzie Trotter, who passed out programs as students entered. This role was essential, as she directed students to enter their names for prize drawings and to fill out feedback forms before leaving in addition to explaining the event. Though we had promoted the event, there were students who had just come to use the library as usual, unaware that anything special was going on. A friendly face at the door with information and signage helped defuse any awkwardness.

Mackenzie also coordinated collection of the door prizes by contacting local businesses via letter. She then followed up by phone and was able to collect around 30 gift certificates from 11 local businesses. Eighty students entered their names for prizes.

## The Night Against Procrastination

The library building is three stories tall with the top floor being a lounge area with a coffee bar and a conference room. This is an inviting, open area, and because there are no book stacks or study areas on this floor, it was a good place to hold activities that could be disruptive to studiers. We partnered with EOU's 1-Up Game club, whose members brought a Wii, a PlayStation, and several card and board games and hosted gaming in the lounge and conference room. The local movie theater donated a 55-gallon bag of freshly made movie theater popcorn, which we placed in the gaming area with paper bowls for students to serve themselves. This was a surprise hit! We later noted popcorn bowls in trash cans in study rooms around the building, indicating that students had gone up to get popcorn and then returned to studying.



We had pizza delivered at 6:00 p.m. and held prize drawings each hour. Though our intent was to bring students to the third floor for prize drawings and study breaks on the hour, the third-floor room was packed throughout the night with students playing games, eating, and socializing.

On the main floor of the library, The Learning Center held drop-in tutoring, a Chemistry faculty member held a study session, and a Writing faculty member held office hours. The faculty participation was an unplanned bonus that resulted from our marketing the event to faculty as well as students.

One of the most popular features of both the pilot and the Fall NAP was a free hot drinks table, also on the main floor. We brought two Keurig coffee makers and a hot water dispenser and provided coffee pods, packets of hot cocoa and apple cider, and tea bags. More than 100 cups were used, and the table was constantly busy. We knew from our Spring pilot that the drinks would be popular, so we designated a staff member and a student worker to keep the table stocked.

At 7:00 p.m., the Triple B Foundation for Pet Therapy brought a miniature horse to visit with students. This was our busiest time of the night, with 60–70 students gathered in the main floor reading room to meet her. We had publicized her visit, and many students had come specifically to see the horse. As a specially trained therapy horse, she was accustomed to greeting and being petted by strangers. After she was done with the crowd, her handler led her around the main floor to visit with students who were studying. According to reports from students the next day, this was probably the most Snapchatted moment of the night.

Our final organized activity of the night was a meal of waffles prepared by library staff at 10:00 p.m. Having done this twice now, we feel that preparing and serving food to our students is a wonderful way to connect. It demonstrates for students the genuine friendliness and service orientation of our staff. Our waffle cooks served over 50 waffles, and many students who had left the event earlier came back for a late-night waffle snack.

### Outcomes

We are a small enough community that we recognize our regulars, and many of the students who attended had not been seen in the library before. Our evening supervisor has reported that some have since become regular evening patrons, which is an outcome that we had hoped for. Altogether, we recorded 155 students over the course of the night, which was a 158 percent increase over the pilot we held in Spring term. Our patron count for the night was double the count for the same night (Sunday before Week 5) in both 2016 and 2015.

We offered a special prize drawing for students who filled out feedback forms before leaving, and we got 39 forms back. Students commented that we should hold such events more often: twice a term or even once a month. Several commented that they had fun *and* got work done. There was some constructive feedback about food options, specifically, offering more healthy snack options. There was also some disappointment that there were no dogs. During the Spring pilot, staff members brought their dogs for students to pet and play with, and we had planned on doing this again. After arranging for a trained therapy horse, however, it was decided that our rambunctious dogs might not mix well with a professional, so we canceled them at the last minute. I personally heard complaints in my classes about



the lack of dogs throughout the following day and concluded that next time dogs should be an essential feature.

We did note that some students just came for the food or the horse, but many of those stayed to chat over a hot drink or to play games. Even if they had not come to study, we still considered this a success as it brought students into the library who had not been there before. They were comfortable and engaged, and events like this reflect positively on the library as a space.

### Considerations for Next Time and Advice

While having one person to do high-level coordination is important, it was key to also empower the planning committee members to make decisions and use their own judgment. We all have day jobs, and putting on an evening event did require some extra work during a busy time of year. Pre-planning when we were less busy was essential. Dividing the labor and keeping meetings to a minimum was also hugely helpful. We used a shared Google Doc to keep track of responsibilities, which we kept from the Spring event so we didn't have to start from scratch in the Fall.

At a public university, there is a certain amount of bureaucracy involved with putting on events, especially when they involve food (EOU has a food service contract with an outside vendor). Several of us had to obtain food handlers' licenses in order to make waffles, and we were required to order pizza from our vendor. There are also restrictions on how library funds can be spent, and though we handled these temporary roadblocks as they came up, it would have been less stressful if we had known and dealt with them earlier. Having an administrator review the planning early on would help predict potential issues. We will also be working with a risk management officer on considerations for having animals at the library.

Marketing can be challenging on our campus. There are restrictions on mass-emailing students, and there are so many posters and flyers up on public boards that we are not sure they all get read. We put out posters and table tents and got flyers into student mailboxes in the residence halls. We also sent posters to faculty and encouraged them to put them up on their office doors. Librarians at EOU teach in the First Year Experience course, so we marketed heavily in class. This worked well, but we have yet to figure out how to best reach students who live off campus.

Nonetheless, doubling our numbers from an average Sunday night meant that the night was a success. If you have the staff who want to do it, campus partners, and students to help with the planning and running the event, the possibilities for activities are numerous. A similar program could easily be adapted in a public or high school library. A Night Against Procrastination can be an inexpensive way of getting students into the library and making new connections and is great fun for everyone involved. 🐾

### References

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