Recasting Collaborations:
An Overview of Best Practices for Student-Librarian Partnerships

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Abstract: This poster outlines best practices for librarian-student collaborations, focusing on student empowerment and casting collaboration as a mutual learning process. These best practices span the life-cycle of librarian-student collaborations by exploring best practices in five categories. The presenters illustrate these best practices by providing examples from successful collaborations undertaken by students and librarians at the University of Maryland. We interviewed four librarians in our department who have undertaken major collaborations with graduate and undergraduate students to understand what makes student-librarian collaborations successful.

Context of Collaborations

- *Research and Teaching Fellowship* (Rachel Gammons)
  - MLIS students from UMD's iSchool learn about pedagogy, teach information literacy for Maryland's first-year writing program, and receive mentorship. Students are paid.
- *Gemstone Partnership* (Jordan Sly)
  - Multidisciplinary four-year research program for selected undergraduate honors students of all majors. Librarians partner with groups of students to help support them in the development of their research skills.
- *LGBTQ Oral History Project* (Ashleigh Coren)
  - Project seeking to capture the history of LGBTQIA students, faculty, staff and alumni at the University of Maryland. Unpaid undergraduate interns transcribed and coded interviews.
- *Video Project for UNIV 100* (Suzy Wilson)
  - Undergraduate students were paid to film and edit a video about primary source literacy for UNIV 100 Students. UNIV 100 is a one-credit seminar for all entering students.

Categories of Attention

- Identifying student collaborators
- Ensuring collaborations are mutually beneficial
- Maintaining awareness of power dynamics
- Negotiating an effective communication plan
- Assessing and reflecting on collaborative projects

Identifying student collaborators

Key item: Ensuring that we are truly collaborating with students, not just enlisting them for our projects.

- **Gemstone:** Although librarians are assigned to students, the program sets up meet-and-greets where students can meet their library partners and veto if necessary. Librarians are paired based on student proposals.

"Engage with students beyond the collaboration, so that you already know what students are doing and what they might want to collaborate on" - Suzy Wilson

Ensuring collaborations are mutually beneficial

Key item: Students should be coming away with valuable experience (in addition to being paid, when appropriate!)

- **LGBTQ Oral History:** Student interns were able to gain valuable experience in their social science disciplines and help with their personal research.

"My main way of knowing it was successful was that the students used the materials in their portfolios, and used librarian collaborators as references for future employment." - Suzy Wilson

Maintaining awareness of power dynamics

Key item: Be aware students may not not have the healthy boundaries around work that your colleagues do.

- **UNIV100 Video:** Emphasizing that students should feel free to prioritize school work, conceiving of students as co-creators, and advocating for students' expertise to administration.

"You're building a learning environment that impacts students for the rest of their lives" - Rachel Gammons

Negotiating an effective communication plan

Key item: All parties should be aware of what's expected of them. Regular check-ins enable clear communication.

- **Fellowship:** Each student has a weekly office hour, and librarians and students have frequent one-on-one check-ins.

"I've had to think more about information-sharing, and not assuming what implicit knowledge of the field people might have" - Ashleigh Coren

Assessing and reflecting on collaborative projects

Key item: Reflection is necessary for improvement. It is most effective when all parties reflect together.

- **Fellowship:** Each student evaluates the feedback given to them by undergraduates, and librarians focus this feedback into reflections on pedagogy.

"We're constantly thinking 'How can we make this better, how can we better serve our students?'" - Rachel Gammons