

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

Lehman College

2013

Planning a Reading and Discussion Series in an Academic Library

Rebecca Arzola
CUNY Lehman College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/le_pubs/87

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Planning a Reading and Discussion Series in an Academic Library

By Rebecca Arzola

Planning a reading series for an academic library takes an initial investment of time, energy and attention to detail. When you consider all the elements involved with planning and executing a reading, the initial investment of time and effort to devise a smoothly run event series is well worth the results. It can be as creative a venture as you have time for. Do what is comfortable for you.

Logistics

There are several logistics that a junior faculty member or seasoned librarian must consider and manage when organizing a reading. If it's your first reading, ask colleagues for input on past events for the protocol. Create a reading-event checklist to remember pointers, suggestions, and tips. You can also create a LibGuide to showcase readings and provide specifics to authors. Create tabs to include information on library space accommodations, an archive of past readings, and the library's promotional services including social media.

Brief Description of Lehman's Reading and Discussion Series

The goal of the *Reading and Discussion Series* at the Leonard Lief Library is to bring together the library and college community to support and highlight the work and scholarship of Lehman College faculty. It showcases publications, research, and works-in-progress from faculty and is scheduled for an hour. The series exposes students to faculty presentations—providing a snapshot of the research process and encouraging future writers and researchers. Department faculty are welcome to request a reading for

their newly published book. Librarian faculty can also submit recommendations, as can department deans. The library tries to produce readings on a variety of subjects.

Protocol

Events at the library are a team effort. If events have taken place before your arrival with no official checklist, I venture to say an informal event protocol exists, it just hasn't been formalized. Create an official event checklist at your library if none exists to help you arrange each reading and remind you of the details. You'll find that you may modify the reading checklist as you produce events. A checklist is also a good document to have so as to facilitate a smooth transfer of information for shared responsibilities or for anyone who will coordinate future readings.

Communication

Communicating with different people is necessary for a well-organized and successful event. The author is the first critical person to communicate with. You will discuss a date and time convenient for both the author and library and any technology requirements needed. You may want to request a brief biography and summary of the book for the flyer and enquire whether the author would like to be introduced by a fellow department faculty member at the reading.

Foster a positive relationship with your library's administrative office, as communication with them is quite important. They will most likely be ordering refreshments, scheduling seating arrangements with the appropriate campus departments, and handling calls for details on the event. They may also be responsible for informing your library or campus security about any outside visitors.

Communication with fellow librarians and staff members is a good idea too. You

can tell them simultaneously at a faculty meeting or send out an e-mail invitation to the reading. Let them know that they can provide support just by attending the event.

Schedule Date and Time

Academic librarians are managing reference, information literacy classes, graduate library interns, student workers, creating research guides, participating in faculty meetings, conferences and planning time for research when on the tenure track. Add readings and events and accurate scheduling becomes a necessity. Suggest two or three dates to the presenter. Avoid conflicts by checking the academic schedule; as an added measure, contact the appropriate campus department to find out about other events like a scheduled fire drill or general faculty meeting. Even if your library has a specific day and time for readings—say Thursdays at 4:00 P.M.—be flexible, as a faculty member’s teaching schedule may require a different day and time.

Reserve Space

Find out how to reserve space in your library. Your library and campus may have distinct room request arrangements for reserving space. The Leonard Lief Library has an “Events Form” that must be submitted, by the reading organizer, when requesting space for a reading, meeting or event. Lehman College also has an online events form that needs to be submitted when any campus event takes place. Based on the anticipated capacity of space, a popular event may need to be moved to a larger location, which needs to be coordinated with the Library Office (administration).

Frequently Asked Questions from Presenters

If you are new to coordinating an event, you may not know the answer to every question.

Be honest and tell presenters you will find out and get back to them. Requests at the

Leonard Lief Library have included availability of a podium, laptop (PC or Mac), overhead projector, and light dimmers. Authors may also ask if they can sell their books at the reading. To help answer some of these questions for authors create an FAQ document or LibGuide; this is also a useful addition to your checklist for future events.

Marketing and Promotion

Try out a few ways to market the event to the college community. Find out if there were previously established marketing tools and update them with current social media.

Publicity for readings may include designing a flyer with established event template to post on campus bulletin boards. Some institutions may require an official stamp from the Office of Student Affairs to post flyers on campus. Submit flyer or quote to the appropriate person in your library for Facebook and Twitter promotion.

Request public services staff to minimize library commitments so as to promote attendance at event by library staff. Contact your Media Relations Department to request videotaping or sound recording for popular readings and check whether they take care of release forms for photo, audio and video clips permission presenters: if they don't, then make sure to add this to your checklist. Videotaping of the audience may also require a signed release form by audience members.

You may also generate an online flyer on an event management registration site like Eventbrite. An online registration site provides immediate access to information on the event once the friendly URL has been emailed to the college community through an e-mail blast or on the library's events page. If you have the time, you can also create a brochure to give out to audience members. Start early for the next reading by having flyers available to handout.

Flyer

The flyer can be created for print and online promotional uses. To develop the flier and promote the reading add the institution's logo, library name, and the author's department, title of book or work-in-progress, image of book or professor, date of event, RSVP date, time, and venue. You can also add both biographical information on the author and a summary of the book. Request the biography from the author or go the professor's academic website and cull the book summary from the author, publisher site, or Amazon's book description. If you are serving light refreshments, that may add some interest too.

Promotion and Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest—they're here to stay. They are also free marketing tools and are used by students. Although students may not think it trendy to add the library sites to their social media collection, they may become interested if you can find an effective way to market the library. Promote the social media sites in information literacy classes. It is also useful to create a general library Gmail account, with the same username and password for all the social media sites, so colleagues can also share other library events.

Technology Requirements

Confirm technology requirements and support with the appropriate campus or library department. Having the tech coordinator around at least in the beginning of the event is helpful. Confirm photography with library newsletter photographer (if there is one) as well as the institution's media relations office.

Budget

There are a few ways to pay for the catering of a reading. If the Library requested a

reading, the Friends of the Library, or other advocacy group, may pay for refreshments. Save a copy of the event flyer to attach to the catering invoice for payment. On the other hand, if the reading was suggested by the faculty member or department dean, they may order and pay for refreshments. Catering costs can also be shared between the library and faculty department through a split invoice. (The Library Office receives an invoice for the food order then forwards it to the Department.) Make sure to discuss a catering request or split invoice in advance with the library administration.

Archiving Events

To help archive readings create a LibGuide which are an accessible way to store and update information including flyers and contact information on presenters. As a service to the campus community, a Pinterest board is another way to archive and promote the authors who have participated in the reading series.

Some Highlights of Readings

There is a learning curve the first few times you put a reading together. Be ready for surprises from people even within the academic community. You'll find that some presenters like to see the venue prior to the event and some are more adaptable and flexible than others. Some like to create a comfortable environment by moving tables and chairs around. Others need to know every detail of the room including if there is a light dimmer.

At Lehman College, the readings are based on professors' research, creative ventures, publications and works-in-progress. Topics have included anthropology, biography, drama, fiction, politics, language development, memoirs, philosophy, poetry, science and sign language. That is the beauty of the academic library reading program—

it can and should incorporate all types of research as well as non-fiction and fiction.

After the Reading

So now you have planned your event, brought it to fruition, and it was a success.

Acknowledge the author by sending a thank-you note or email correspondence after the reading. The Chief Librarian at the Leonard Lief Library enjoys attending readings and sending a short email thanking the faculty member for their presentation. The event organizer can do the same. A note or email sends an appreciative and professional polish to conclude a well-attended event.

Reflection

After a reading reflect on the event. What worked? What needed extra effort? Use this time to update the steps in the event checklist. Send the event checklist to your supervisor to inform them on the process and to promote your own hard work—especially if you are on a tenure track or for your annual evaluations. You may be surprised at how all the strings you pull to plan, promote and execute a well-run and well-attended reading may help you in other types of library events.

Reading Checklist Template

Here is the checklist that we use for our *Reading and Discussion Series* at Lehman College:

1. Set date and time
2. Contact Campus Space Reservations Officer about the college schedule of events—to coordinate library events and avoid conflicts.
3. Reserve Space
 - a. Fill-out and route Events Form and submit online events calendar
4. Publicity
 - a. Design flier with established event template
 - b. E-mail to Chief Librarian for editing and approval
 - c. Get flyer stamped at Office of Student Affairs
 - d. Post fliers on campus bulletin boards

- e. E-mail flyer to Instructional Technologies Librarian for placement on Facebook and Twitter
 - f. Add Pins of Faculty members on Pinterest
 - g. Create an online flier on Eventbrite.com
 - h. Update library calendar
 - i. Email Reference and Instruction librarians to minimize faculty commitments and to promote attendance at event
5. Invite liaisons to event
 6. Confirm technology requirements and support with Library Technology Coordinator
 7. Generate RSVP list (through Eventbrite or document list)
 8. Arrange catering with Library Office (based on number of RSVPs)
 9. Seating capacity: Popular events may need to be moved to larger location. Coordinate with Library Office.

Rebecca Arzola is Government Documents-Collection Development Librarian and Assistant Professor at Lehman College, Bronx, NY. She oversees the Library's Federal Depository collection, and is focused on bridging the gap between government information and students through engagement and information literacy. Rebecca holds an MSLIS and Advanced Certificate in Archives from Pratt Institute, as well as an MEd in Special Education and BA in Speech Pathology and Audiology from Lehman. Prior to her appointment at Lehman, she worked for New York Public Library and was a Special Education teacher in the New York City Department of Education.