

The Future of Print Report: Surprise Me!

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About the Future of Print

ASU Library was awarded a \$381K grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to experiment with different ways in which libraries present print materials to the public. We know that information is more digitally accessible than ever before. As students turn to what is quick and convenient for them, ASU Library is exploring how to present our print materials in ways that remain engaging and relevant to the twenty-first century user. Through a series of book displays, The Future of Print team hopes to gain a sense for how students perceive print collections, how they use the library, and what it takes to engage them in physical books. For more information on our projects, visit

<https://lib.asu.edu/futureprint>

Research Question

This display was the first of several experiments to provide insight into one of our research questions: how do students respond if we present them with print books in non-traditional ways?

Philosophy

We came across an article discussing a trend where people intentionally shelf their books spine backward. Reminiscent of the “Blind Date with a Book” concept, book titles are hidden to encourage randomized selection, or serendipitous discovery. Intrigued by the mixed responses, our team decided that this would be a fitting opportunity to experiment with how we organized our print collections. Would doing so cause students to stop and consider library collections? Does shelving books in a non-traditional manner mean that they are more likely to engage with print collections? Will they be surprised, interested, or confused by the set-up?

Fletcher Library at ASU’s West campus regularly experiments with book displays, often introducing several at once. Ongoing themes focus on graphic novels, literature, and the fine arts. We were curious how students at this library, who are accustomed to seeing themed book displays, would respond to a new book display where none of the spines were visible.

We selected books containing works of poetry, because it is a literary form that conveys ideas by presenting words in non-traditional formats. This was also an opportunity to highlight the works of both renowned and lesser known poets, giving both an equal chance of being discovered.

Full Selection Methodology

The primary selection factors for this collection were the author’s identity and the year of publication. Examples of author identity include poets of color, indigenous poets, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and women. As mentioned previously, more traditional poets such as Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson were first added. The focus then shifted to include poets who are actively writing, or modern poets.

I searched Amazon book lists, poetry.org, and poetryfoundation.org to identify some of these traditionally-studied poets as well as current poets who might be less well-read due to how recent some of their works may be. I also searched ALMA for titles containing the subject “poetry” and that were located in Fletcher. Using the filter “begins

with PS 35” and “begins with PQ 21” helped to narrow the results, as these were the call number ranges containing poetry. This process was repeated for other LC class ranges that contained poetry. This strategy produced another list of potential titles which I reviewed for additional titles. Amazon was a helpful tool in identifying highly-rated and well-reviewed books for each poet. I added titles and other bibliographic data points to a [Google spreadsheet](#).

A total of 150 books were selected to keep this collection simple and focused. It was also decided that only titles already located at Fletcher would be included, because it was more convenient. After receiving this curated list of 150 poetry books via email, Jason Johnson, responsible for maintaining the collection at Fletcher, pulled each item using the call numbers provided on the spreadsheet. He marked which were missing or checked-out. I was then able to go back and add more titles to bring the count back to 150.

Assessment Mechanisms

Focus Group

Our project team hosted a focus group to get a better understanding of how undergraduate students use the library. We formed a list of [ten questions](#) that would give us a sense of their information seeking behaviors and personal experiences with ASU Library. I have compiled the responses, our notes, and a reflection of important takeaways into a single document that will help us as we develop future print collections to be useful and engaging:

- [Event Analysis](#)

Bookmarks

Nine different [bookmarks](#) were created featuring facts and quotations from poets in the collection. We intentionally placed them near the display to measure engagement. Counting the number of bookmarks that were taken by the end of the month allowed us to see whether or not students were visiting the display, even if they were not necessarily checking out a book. This allows us to account for user engagement using factors other than circulation data. Perhaps the user was unsure whether or not they could take a book but were still interested in poetry. Perhaps they had simply walked by and noticed the display.

Jason counted the bookmarks at the end of each week and logged it in a [spreadsheet](#). By the end of the month, twelve bookmarks were taken.

Emoji Assessment Board

We invited students to rate the display by sticking an emoji sticker on a board that represents how they feel about the collection. We chose this form of assessment, because we thought it would be both fun and easy for students to participate. We interpreted the stickers based on a likert scale to gauge levels of interest:

☹️ 1 - Individual has a low level of engagement. They may dislike not being able to read the spine of the book. They may also dislike poetry.

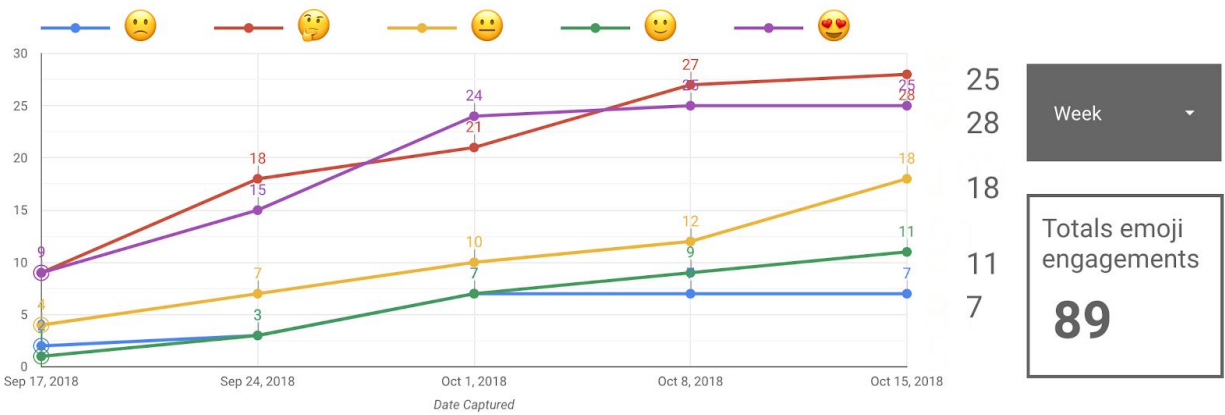
😐 2 - Individual is indifferent to the display. They might not like the display or care that it is there. This emoji could mean that

😬 3 - Individual is engaged to the point of thinking about contents of display. We interpret this as the display being either confusing or thought-provoking. It could cause students to think about the purpose of libraries and book collections.

😊 4 - Individual is engaged and likes the display.

😍 5 - Individual is very engaged with display and likely to check out future library collections.

Jason sent us [weekly photos](#) (from September 15th to October 15th) of the emoji assessment board so that we could study the change over time. Tammy Dang, responsible for the data analysis of our projects, created a data visualization to represent the varying levels of student engagement.



Checkout Data Highlights				
# Items Loaned	# Years Since Last Loan	Loans Increased from Previous Months	Collection Users	Poetry Subjects Loaned
3	29.6	5x	Undergraduate Barrett Honors Undergraduate	African Americans Modern 20th Century

Alt text: Emoji engagement plotted line chart with annotations below.

Circulation

We were able to track how many books were checked out using ALMA Analytics. Out of 150 books, three books were checked out from the collection:

- *Invisible String* by Christine Swanberg
- *Jelly Roll: A Blues* by Kevin Young
- *Rising, Falling, Hovering* by C. D. Wright

Tammy discovered that, although these titles had been owned by the Library for up to 22 years, they had never been checked out until they were featured in this collection. She also configured that, over the course of a month, this equated to a 1% increase in checkouts per day. This is a 400% increase of checkouts from books in this collection.

Reflection

Successes

- By only selecting books from Fletcher, we simply had to change the temporary location code to 'In Exhibit.' We were able to do this all at once using a list of barcodes.
- Jason Johnson was our point-person at Fletcher Library. He helped us identify a space, find materials, and move the books. After our initial face-to-face meeting, we were able to communicate via Slack and email to manage the collection remotely. He was also essential to helping us communicate the project to the rest of the library staff.
- The book *Invisible String* by Christine Swanberg was checked out for the first time since 1996. The increased visibility contributed to its circulation for the first time in 22 years.
- A total of 89 emoji stickers were stuck on our assessment board showing that, students were noticing the book display and stopping to think about it. This proves that tracking loan dates are not the only way to assess user engagement. It is also encouraged that the majority of emojis expressed thoughtful and positive reactions.
- An hour before our focus group event, we approached students who looked like they were utilizing the library to relax rather than study. We shared our purpose and invited them to attend the event. Six students came to the focus group as a result of this method of outreach...though the mention of free food may have been the real incentive.

Challenges

- The organization of the books once they were placed on the shelf may have been a challenge for users. They were not placed in call number order which could make it difficult for patrons to know the shelf location for a specific book they desired. For example, if a user found a specific call number using the library catalog and came to the library to check it out, they would have a hard time finding the book. The catalog would tell them that the book was in an exhibit, but not which one. Once they found the right exhibit, the call numbers were not visible, and the books were not organized in call number order.

- We tried a variety of outreach strategies, but none affected the number of students in attendance. A [flyer](#) was put next to the book display for the month with the event details. We encouraged faculty at the Barrett Honors college and [first-year English instructors](#) who taught a course at the West campus to invite their students to this event. We also reached out to related student groups to make them aware of the event. An Instagram post was made the day of the event and flyers were posted around Fletcher Library. Despite these efforts, all six students who attended came as a result of being invited in-person an hour before the event.
- The event was held at 7pm, at the end of the day. There are only two residence halls at ASU's West campus, which tells us that the majority of students might go home after their classes. 7pm was not a high-traffic time to reach students, and the students who were there were there with a purpose: to study. In the future, we might consider a daytime event.

Discussion

Launching the Surprise Me! Book display as our first experiment proved to be a good decision, because it was the most straightforward to execute. The books did not have to be moved between branch libraries, and we were able to work with a knowledgeable point-person at Fletcher library who then ended up joining our team for future projects. We were able to create and implement a successful workflow to model future experiments after.

We were also able to build good relationships with the students who attended our focus group. They mentioned that they were likely to come back to future events if they knew about them. The informal nature of the event and the nacho bar created a good experience for them. Based on our experience and student feedback, we learned that a personal invitation was a better strategy in this case than social media, posters, or reaching out to student groups. Perhaps the event itself was not of interest to them or they could not prioritize it with their schedules.

We were encouraged to see that, although there were a low number of items that had been loaned, the emoji board showed quite a bit of engagement. Students were, in fact, stopping to comment on the display. This shows the benefit of measuring student engagement in ways other than circulation.

Overall, we were better able to understand our collections from the perspectives of students and gained a sense for how to outreach to these different groups. This knowledge will help us in our future experiments.

Press

[State Press Article](#)

[ASU Event Listing](#)

[ASU Now](#)

Additional documents

- [Notes to Staff](#)
 - A description of the Surprise Me! Collection and event for the staff at Fletcher Library and a set of instructions to maintain the display

Appendix

Resources mentioned:

- [ASU Event Listing](#)
- [ASU Now](#)
- [Bookmarks](#)
 - Images of bookmarks that were next to the display
- [Bookmark Counts](#)
 - Spreadsheet showing the number of bookmarks taken throughout the month
- [Email Invitation](#)
 - Email to first-year English instructors at ASU, inviting their students to the focus group event
- [Emoji Assessment Photos](#)
 - Weekly photos showing the emojis students used to 'Rate the Display'
- [Event Analysis](#)
 - Summary of observations and lessons learned from the focus group event
- [Focus Group Event Flyer](#)
 - Flyer that was at the display advertising the event
- [Focus Group Questions](#)
 - List of ten questions that were asked to students to learn how they use the library
- [Notes to Staff](#)
 - A description of the Surprise Me! Collection and event for the staff at Fletcher Library and a set of instructions to maintain the display
- [State Press Article](#)

- [Surprise Me! Book List](#)
 - Spreadsheet of book titles, authors, call numbers, worldcat links, and loan dates if the title was checked out by a patron