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From Golden to Xuzhou

Teaching a graduate student workshop in China

In late spring 2019, eight staff members from the Colorado School of Mines (Mines) Arthur Lakes Library, in Golden, Colorado, visited the China University of Mining and Technology (CUMT) in Xuzhou, China. The trip was intended to develop a relationship between the two libraries and foster future partnerships. The visit, which centered around the Symposium on Mines-CUMT Library Collaboration, included presentations by Mines and CUMT staff, museum visits, cultural activities, and a full-day workshop for early career researchers.

The authors were invited to conduct the one-day “Workshop on Writing and Publishing for Graduate Students,” which provided students with skills and knowledge they would need across the research life cycle as emerging scholars. The workshop was conducted with an emphasis on Western (primarily American and European) publishing models and practices. The day was broken down into four main sections covering best practices in academic writing, publishing models, scholarly identity, research impact, and tools, such as citation management software. Each session consisted of lecture, individual activities, and group discussion. The goal was to support students’ publishing in international journals by identifying and understanding tools from different stages of the research lifecycle, online profiling platforms, and different publishing models. The team is now exploring how to adapt this workshop to an online environment in response to COVID-19.

Planning and preparation

Emily Bongiovanni, scholarly communications librarian at Mines, led the team and served as the primary point of contact for CUMT librarians in planning the workshop. As with any international exchange involving a language barrier, a lot of back and forth was required in order to fully understand each other’s goals and desired outcomes. Bongiovanni met with the Mines team frequently to develop the day’s program and relay information from her CUMT contact.

As part of the preparation, the CUMT team sent Bongiovanni approximately 50 papers the graduate students intended to submit to English-language journals. The Mines team reviewed the papers and tailored the workshop to meet the needs of those students. Since the team is not trained in teaching English as a Second Language, we did not provide feedback on specific language usage during the workshop, other than commonly occurring grammatical norms in STEM publishing.

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The workshop was based on the Mines' Modern Researcher 101 series. This highly popular workshop series aims to provide early career researchers with tips, tools, and best practices across the research lifecycle. The Mines team converted portions of this series to a one-day workshop for the CUMT graduate students. The workshop content was reviewed by CUMT librarians to ensure we presented on the topics they found most useful for their students. The workshop outline was exchanged three times before finalizing topics for the day.

We carefully planned for language barriers, cultural differences, and electronic resource access. The authors researched cultural differences for teaching norms typical to the Chinese classroom to identify common American teaching practices that could impact the students' learning. In addition to our research, two of the authors had experience teaching in a foreign country and one had previously visited China, enabling them to provide advice to the rest of the teaching team.

The workshop was organized into manageable topics and taught entirely in English. Organizing the content into manageable topics also enabled team members to take leadership for a single session, minimizing the amount of work to be done by the scholarly communications librarian. Breaks were scheduled throughout the day to diminish the cognitive overload of processing new content while learning in a second language. These

breaks provided students with the opportunity to ask questions one-on-one, if they felt uncomfortable asking their question in front of the entire group.

An essential part of workshop planning was ensuring access to our familiar databases, websites, and citation management tools while in China. The workshop's structure required the team to be able to demonstrate websites and research tools and assist students with hands-on practice. As each team member worked on their portion of the content in preparation for the workshop, they sent website links and tools to Bongiovanni to share with the CUMT team. The tools were tested on CUMT's network to ensure they would operate properly, including the Mines Library Catalog, ORCID, and Zotero.

Bongiovanni's leadership in collaborating with the CUMT librarians to plan the workshop was essential to its success.

There were challenges coordinating the team as the workshop required more thought and careful planning than typically needed. Preparation efforts took place at the end of the Mines spring semester, a difficult period to arrange meetings for the four-member team who were also planning for the companion symposium and arranging logistics of the trip to China.

Teaching the workshop

The day began with a welcome speech by the CUMT associate dean of the graduate school and group photo. The first session



Emily Bongiovanni teaching at the workshop.

covered the benefits of using citation management software, demonstrated Zotero, and provided students structured time to practice. In the second session, students learned about information and resources on conducting a review of a discipline's literature and tips for structuring the literature review portion of a thesis or scholarly article. The third session contained advice for technical writing in English based on the papers previously shared by the attending students.

In the fourth session, students learned about their publishing options, tips for selecting journals to target for publication, and resources for enhancing their scholarly identity. Structured time was provided for students to claim and begin populating

their ORCID accounts. The day concluded with a discussion on additional resources and topics for further exploration. Students completed a three-question survey on the effectiveness of the workshop.

We felt it was critical to provide a variety of methods to encourage students to ask questions during the workshop. Question time was built into each section to encourage student participation and open discussion. We recognized the need to be sensitive to potential cultural differences in the classroom and students' level of comfort participating in active learning. Students were given notecards at the beginning of the day to write questions throughout the workshop. Attendees were encouraged to ask questions using the method with which they were most comfortable, including raising hands, using

notecards, or approaching the presenters during breaks or activities. Students could ask questions in Chinese or English, and our hosts provided translations, as needed.

The event was largely successful. We received positive feedback from the CUMT hosts and the workshop attendees. The audience was engaged throughout the entire day and asked thought-provoking questions. Student feedback via the end-of-workshop survey especially emphasized the usefulness

of the research tools demonstrated.

Lessons learned

Developing and teaching the workshop was a unique learning experience for the authors, and we learned valuable lessons about teaching abroad. 1) Even a well-

planned event will have surprises, so be flexible. Right up until the workshop, we were still learning about the resources we could access from the local Internet network. We were all unfamiliar working with translation services and had to adapt on the fly. 2) Planning an international workshop takes longer than anticipated, so give yourself more time. You are not only planning the details of the workshop content and schedule, but also your travel and other potential activities during your visit. 3) You can't know everything, so don't be afraid to ask "stupid" questions throughout the process. Seek clarification on anything you are unsure of, such as how your contact would like to be addressed in emails.

While instructional best practices are always important, there are also a few special



Workshop attendees during breakout activity.

items to consider. 4) Have learning materials available in both languages whenever possible. This will help your students avoid cognitive overload and can help to clarify questions about research-specific jargon. 5) Doing your homework on the host country's cultural norms in the classroom is essential. We knew we would be using standard American teaching practices, such as active learning, and needed to identify areas of possible confusion or discomfort for our students.

Teaching this workshop was a unique opportunity for the Mines team. We each learned new skills and perspectives that have already successfully impacted our work on our own campus. This includes insight into our teaching practices and our delivery of reference services. There is a significant population of international students at Mines who we will now be better able to serve. We are grateful to have

had the opportunity to collaborate with the CUMT librarians and work with their graduate students.

Our workshop in the time of COVID-19

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team has recognized the need for an online version of this type of workshop. This new learning environment has sparked ideas for adapting it as a one-day virtual workshop intended for international early career researchers. It will be especially useful for students who may have difficulty connecting with advisors, faculty, and librarians at their institutions. The team is exploring delivery options for a successful interactive workshop that offers both asynchronous and synchronous learning activities. The team intends to share and license any resources developed for others to use, modify, and redistribute to meet their campus' needs. *~*



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