

**Providence College**

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# If you Built it, They Will Come: Strategies for Developing an Undergraduate Research Conference

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# TEACHING TOOLS & TIPS

## IF YOU BUILT IT, THEY WILL COME: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

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### ABSTRACT

The benefits of conference participation for undergraduates are now well understood, but the same cannot be said for the practical question of how to create and fund such opportunities for students, particularly at smaller liberal arts colleges. We seek to provide faculty and students with useful lessons for organizing, funding, and disseminating student research presented at discipline-specific undergraduate conferences. Hosting an undergraduate research conference pays dividends for faculty and students by a) providing incentives for undergraduates to revise and extend seminar papers for presentation, b) creating opportunities for students and faculty to meet and discuss their work among students with similar interests from other institutions, and c) offering hands-on opportunities for students at the host institution to participate in both the peer review process and event planning. Finally, we share practical lessons for how to publish student work in a publicly accessible digital repository that can be shared with potential employers, graduate schools, and other external constituencies through stable record and conference paper URLs.

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*"Ray, people will come, Ray. They'll come ... for reasons they can't even fathom. They'll turn up your driveway not even sure why they're doing it... Oh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come."*

- Field of Dreams, 1989 (imdb)

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, national organizations such as the Council on Undergraduate Research and a wide range of individual colleges and universities recognized the value of undergraduate research and sought to create new opportunities for students to share their work with faculty and peers. Beginning in the late 1980s, a wide range of institutions, including Butler University, the University of California-Davis, and the University of New Hampshire, to name but a few, sponsored campus-wide or system-wide events to showcase undergraduate scholarship. In addition to these broad-based events, regional conferences for students in psychology, sociology, and other disciplines also provided venues for students to present papers in a professional setting.

Numerous studies (Carsrud, Palladino, Tanke, Aubrecht & Huber, 1984; Furedy & McRae, 1985; Helm & Bailey 2013; Mabrouk, 2009) examine why undergraduates from a wide range of disciplines benefit from presenting research in formal conference settings. Students derive significant benefits from presenting their research to faculty and peers in a professional setting. As Mabrouk (2009) noted in her study of undergraduate chemistry students, all conference participants were strongly motivated to share their work with others in a poster session, and a substantial proportion of attendees reported that conference participation offered an opportunity to have fun (69%), build their resumes (56%), develop self-confidence (48%), and hone presentation skills. Furthermore, recent studies of psychology students suggest that the act of presenting research – rather than simply attending conference sessions – fostered a greater sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and a better understanding of research methods (Helm & Bailey, 2013). Conference participation, therefore, equips students with marketable skills that are valued in both a competitive job market and in graduate school. For example, a recent survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) found that an overwhelming proportion of business and nonprofit leaders placed a high priority on applicants' written and oral communication skills and abilities in hiring decisions (AACU, 2013).

Although the benefits of conference participation for undergraduates are now well understood, the same cannot be said for the practical question of how to create and fund such opportunities for students, particularly at smaller liberal arts colleges. Furthermore, the Boyer Commission Report

recommended not only greater focus on undergraduate research experiences, but also that the “dissemination of results is an essential and integral part of the research process” (Boyer Commission 1998, p. 24). To date, campus-supported strategies for how to make the fruits of students’ labor (e.g., papers, posters, and proceedings) readily accessible through publishing platforms to faculty, students, potential employers, and graduate schools remain a work in progress. Our paper identifies useful lessons to expand opportunities for presenting undergraduate research. In particular, we focus on several practical questions: How can departments and programs create and fund discipline-specific undergraduate research conferences? How can institutions attract a geographically diverse group of students to participate in such events? How can student work be widely disseminated and archived?

### GETTING STARTED

Hosting a successful undergraduate research conference requires communication and cooperation among faculty, students, and administrators. The impetus for a conference may come from faculty, students, or administrators, but faculty buy-in is essential for the success of such events, as organizing and funding an undergraduate conference requires ongoing and extensive faculty involvement. In particular, finding the resources necessary to host a conference depends on strong faculty leadership and often the involvement of department chairs or program directors who control budget allocations, scheduling, and reserving campus space. Start-up funds to pilot an undergraduate research conference may be found through department funds, grants from centers for student engagement, or similar on-campus grant programs. On most campuses, faculty involvement in writing grants, organizing faculty and students to review and select papers, reserving space, and publicizing the event to attract submissions from students at other institutions will be vital to the success of a discipline-specific undergraduate conference.

At Providence College, faculty in the Health Policy and Management (HPM) program raised the possibility of hosting an undergraduate conference as part of a strategic planning process in 2009. Since program faculty represented a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, including medical sociology, medical anthropology, health policy, and the history of medicine, a strategic planning process offered a way to identify common areas of interest, opportunities for student-faculty collaboration, and resources to support new initiatives. The resulting document, *Health Policy and Management in Transition*, provided a blueprint for new programmatic initiatives. Results of the program’s self-study and planning process were shared with key leaders on campus, such as the college dean, the provost, and staff from the college’s Office of Institutional Advancement. The new strategic plan reflected the program’s vision to “be an

innovator in the education of undergraduate students aspiring to serve their communities in the field of health services management, health policymaking, and public health practice." By hosting an interdisciplinary undergraduate conference on health and society, faculty sought to highlight the importance of undergraduate research and to signal a new direction for the program.

Beginning in 2010, the HPM program sponsored an interdisciplinary undergraduate research conference on "Health and Society" that offers students an opportunity to present papers in a professional conference setting. Each year, the conference features a rich array of themed panels moderated by faculty discussants to showcase student research in health policy, healthcare management, medical anthropology and sociology, biomedical ethics, and public health, among others. The conference enriches the intellectual environment within the program by introducing students to a fresh set of topics and issues. The opportunity to present their work at a conference within their own discipline challenges undergraduate students at Providence College to revise and extend research papers prepared for seminar courses in the program. By offering a new setting to showcase their work, the conference also raises expectations for written and oral presentations. Conference sessions introduce Providence College students to the work of their peers at colleges and universities from around the United States and Canada who had taken different coursework or approached common topics from new perspectives. Thus, the conference affords Providence College students and faculty a chance to meet, identify shared interests, and discuss their work with peers from other institutions. Finally, the process of organizing a research conference also offers hands-on professional socialization experiences. Students participate in the peer-review process and in the creation of themed panels. They also manage the registration process and provide hospitality services for attendees, affording participating undergraduates with real-world event planning experience.

### GETTING ORGANIZED

Creating an undergraduate research conference requires faculty to answer several initial organizational questions: How large should the conference be? How will participants be recruited? How will submissions be evaluated? Let us consider each in turn.

#### *Size*

First, organizers must decide how many presenters, panels, and papers will be included in the conference program. The answer to this question will affect the number of rooms required, the budget for food and conference materials, and the number of faculty required to chair panels. Many universities sponsor

campus-wide undergraduate research conferences or celebrations of scholarship that attract hundreds of student presenters to poster sessions, presentations, and performances (Commonwealth Honors College, 2014). The National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) operates on an even larger scale, regularly drawing 3,000 or more participants from 300-plus research universities across the United States (Council on Undergraduate Research, 2014). In contrast, hosting a smaller conference on health policy, healthcare management, or public health affords students a supportive setting to present their work surrounded by peers and faculty with similar interests. Conferences with 20-40 student papers organized into a number of themed panels also allow for presenters and other students to attend and participate in a variety of sessions. As is the case with larger academic conferences, organizers face a choice about whether or not to schedule panels concurrently. Concurrent sessions allow for variety in the conference program, but also limit the ability of participants to attend all presentations. Trade-offs exist in organizing a conference; while more choice affords students and faculty a better chance to find papers and panels of interest, too many panels scheduled during each time block may result in low attendance, thereby limiting opportunities for participation from audience members.

### *Selectivity*

Organizers must also decide how selective the process of reviewing paper proposals should be. Undergraduate research conferences may be highly competitive, or conversely, may emphasize a developmental approach by accepting most, if not all, proposals. On the one hand, a rigorous peer-review process showcases the best student work in the field and provides attendees with strong role models to emulate. On the other hand, accepting a large proportion of – or even all – submissions broadens opportunities for participation and provides an important professional socialization experience for participating students. Decisions about selectivity are directly related to the size of the conference itself as a more rigorous selection process will result in a more compact program, while a more inclusive process will allow for a larger and more varied program.

At Providence College, our annual conference on health and society relies upon a collaborative faculty-student peer-review process to select papers. Potential participants are invited to submit 250-word abstracts of proposed papers by late January to a dedicated email account. A joint student-faculty selection committee, comprised of 4-6 undergraduate students and 3-4 faculty, reviews all proposals and selects between 20-28 papers for inclusion in the

conference. Each year, a majority of the faculty in the HPM program participated in the selection process; faculty also nominate students to serve on the selection committee. Students, for their part, demonstrate a strong interest in working with faculty to organize the conference. Students regard participation in the peer-review process and conference planning both as recognition of their academic performance and as a meaningful addition to their personal résumés.

Each year, the program hosts a selection dinner at a local restaurant to discuss all submissions to the conference in an informal setting. Students and faculty receive copies of all abstracts in advance with all identifying information removed to create a blind review process. At the outset of the selection process, faculty review key criteria for a successful abstract (e.g., clarity, organization, and a strong thesis). Students are then invited to nominate strong proposals for acceptance, and concurrently, to identify other proposals that do not meet these criteria. To maintain a sense of institutional memory, HPM faculty invite at least one student to join the selection committee who had participated in a previous year's conference. The selection process typically lasts 2-3 hours; since the students have read all proposals in advance, discussion focuses on the relative merits of abstracts for which a clear consensus has yet to emerge. Student participants include a range of sophomores, juniors, and seniors; all students can benefit from participating in a peer-review evaluation process. Since 2010, the annual conference on Health and Society at Providence College accepted an average of 75-80% of abstracts submitted for consideration. This ratio is consistent with the notion of Carsrud et al. (1984) that the role of undergraduate research conferences "as primarily an educational tool probably justifies accepting most papers" (p. 143).

Students also participate in the process of forming panels, identifying common themes among abstracts on the basis of topic, discipline, or methodology. Conference sessions feature concurrent panels offered at three different times, two morning sessions from 10-11:15 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m., and one session in the afternoon from 2:30-3:45 p.m. Each panel includes 3-4 student papers and is chaired by a faculty member who also serves as a discussant. Students are allotted 15 minutes to present their papers, with a minimum of 15 minutes for Q&A from the audience. In recent years, panels included a wide range of themes, such as Gendered Dimensions of Health, Challenges in Contemporary Global Health Practice, and Care Management 2.0: Changing Care Models.

### *Marketing*

Hosting an undergraduate conference provides departments and programs with an opportunity to demonstrate a concrete commitment to engaged student learning. Furthermore, conferences introduce students and faculty to a wide variety of different disciplinary perspectives, fresh new topics, and different conceptual lenses with which to study health and healthcare. To achieve these goals, however, organizers must first entice students from a variety of different institutions to submit abstracts for consideration. Conference organizers, therefore, must make marketing a priority. To promote broad-based participation in undergraduate research conferences, faculty should employ a multipronged marketing strategy. Personal emails from faculty to colleagues teaching similar courses at other institutions provide an inexpensive and highly effective form of advertising. At Providence College, HPM faculty emailed a Call for Papers (CFP) to colleagues, including an attached poster. Our outreach efforts focused on both similar programs in the region (e.g., healthcare administration, health and society, and public health programs) as well as colleagues teaching related courses within other disciplines such as anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, and sociology. The CFP is intentionally open-ended to encourage a wide range of submissions. The call for submissions reads as follows:

The Health Policy and Management Program at Providence College invites advanced undergraduates to submit paper proposals for our annual undergraduate conference to be held on Saturday, March x, 201x.

The subject of this interdisciplinary conference is “Health and Society,” and papers from all areas of inquiry are welcome, especially Anthropology, Biomedical Ethics, Economics, Health Care Management, History, Literature, Political Science, Public Health, and Sociology. Abstracts will be peer reviewed on a competitive basis. The conference format is an oral presentation of 15 minutes in length with a faculty moderator and discussant.

Inquiries and 250-word abstracts should be submitted via email to [phealthpolicy-conference@gmail.com](mailto:phealthpolicy-conference@gmail.com). For additional information, consult the conference website at <http://www.providence.edu/hpm/Pages/Conference.aspx>.

Faculty also reached out to a broader audience by posting copies of the CFP to H-Net and discipline-specific websites (e.g., the Northeast Popular/American Culture Association and the American Association for the History of Medicine). The program also commissioned the services of a local graphic designer to create (and in subsequent years, to update) a promotional poster for distribution in hard copy and via the web. Using public domain images

from the National Library of Medicine, conference posters provide a visually engaging tool for soliciting papers, as copies are mailed to faculty and departments at colleges and universities throughout the region (in particular, we ensure that colleagues who participated in past years receive copies to post on department bulletin boards and outside faculty offices).

#### *Peer networking*

Undergraduate research conferences complement the growing emphasis on engaged student learning at colleges and universities around the nation and also reflect the “emergence and spread of interdisciplinary undergraduate curricula in public health” (Hovland, Kirkwood, Ward, Osterweis, & Silver, 2009). Conference participation, therefore, affords students a range of opportunities for professional socialization and hands-on learning experiences outside of the traditional classroom setting. At Providence College, for example, students and faculty have the opportunity to discuss their work with students and faculty from different institutions at informal brunch and lunch gatherings. Informal sessions provide important networking opportunities for faculty and students alike.

#### *Polishing presentation skills*

Undergraduate research conferences are important vehicles for professional socialization. Undergraduate research conferences in psychology, for example, not only fostered a greater appreciation for the importance of research, but also aided students in defining their future career plans and helped them to “think like psychologists” (Carsrud, Palladino, Tanke, Aubrecht, & Huber, 1984; Helm & Bailey, 2013). At Providence College, faculty work closely with student presenters to polish their papers and their presentation skills in the weeks leading up to the conference. Students receive written feedback on their papers and are encouraged (but not required) to address issues raised by faculty before publishing their work online. Faculty feedback for Providence College student presenters is designed to improve the organization and flow of student writing in advance of online publication for a diverse audience of prospective employers, graduate schools, and other constituencies.

#### **FINANCING: ASK AND YOU (MIGHT) RECEIVE**

Many professional associations and learned societies fund annual meetings and conferences by charging membership dues or significant registration fees for attendees. Since conferences typically provide food and refreshments for attendees, pay stipends to visiting speakers, and provide participants with a formal conference program or other take-home materials, even a small event

requires a financial commitment from the host institution. To attract a wide range of students, organizers must keep the cost of participation affordable for students. Since few undergraduates have access to dedicated funds to defray research or travel costs, departments and programs interested in hosting an undergraduate research conference must identify revenue sources aside from registration fees to fund such events. Securing funding, however, is a significant challenge in the context of limited departmental budgets and belt-tightening at many campuses across the U.S. In particular, the cost of catering services presents a significant financial hurdle, as many colleges have contracts with food service vendors that require campus functions to utilize a designated provider (e.g., Aramark, Bon Appetit, Sodexo). To defray the cost of food, presenters at Providence College's Annual Conference on Health and Society pay a modest registration fee. The cost is \$10 for Providence College students and guests, and \$20 for presenters from other institutions. Only presenters and guests who wish to attend the brunch/lunch sessions pay a registration fee. All other students, faculty, and guests may attend panel sessions without charge. Charging a modest registration fee, however, serves a two-fold purpose by a) generating revenue to offset the costs of the conference and b) creating an incentive for students with accepted papers to attend. As a small token of appreciation for their work, faculty discussants receive complimentary registration.

Funding for events to promote student engagement is increasingly common on many campuses – faculty only need to know where to look and who to ask. Organizers should be prepared to knock on multiple doors, exchange a flurry of emails, and in many cases submit applications for on-campus grant funding. Working closely with college and university development offices also offers a promising path to identify potential donors or restricted accounts that can be used for conference costs. As a result, the planning process for a successful conference must begin several months – if not a year – in advance to provide needed time to secure funding. Faculty should consult with academic administration (e.g., deans and provosts), Centers for Teaching Excellence, and other campus resources to identify potential on-campus resources.

At Providence College, planning for our first annual conference ran into significant roadblocks in 2009. Preliminary estimates for a continental brunch, lunch, and closing reception for a one-day conference promised to consume most of the program's food budget for the upcoming fiscal year (projected expenses exceeded \$1,000 for a continental brunch and luncheon buffet for 30-40 people). Since funding the conference through departmental budgets was not possible, faculty explored alternative financing mechanisms. External grant programs were considered, but ultimately not pursued, for most were

time intensive, highly competitive, and often included significant reporting requirements. Instead, faculty turned to college fundraising staff in the College's Office of Institutional Advancement to explore potential on-campus funding sources. Our timing was fortuitous, as Providence College received a grant from the Davis Educational Foundation to provide funds to support engaged student learning. After encouraging initial consultations with the Provost's office, a newly hired faculty member, Dr. Deborah Levine, applied for and received a grant award to cover the costs of food, printing, and supplies for our inaugural conference (under \$2,000). In addition, the grant award provided resources (\$150) for a graphic designer to create a poster for the upcoming conference (Appendix A). Hard copies of the poster were mailed to faculty at area colleges and universities, and a web-optimized version of the poster was posted on the program's website (Fig. 1) and emailed by faculty to colleagues at other institutions to raise awareness of our inaugural event. To defray the cost of nametags, programs, posters, folders, and other materials, presenters were charged a modest registration fee. With more than 20 presenters and numerous guests, registration fees generated more than \$500 to offset conference costs.

Figure 1  
The Conference Website

## Undergraduate Conference

Our annual conference provides students and faculty at PC with an opportunity to experience the challenges and rewards of organizing an academic conference. As such, it is a remarkable hands-on exercise in professional socialization. Each year, PC students participate as full partners in peer reviewing paper proposals. Students also develop hands-on experience in event planning, as student workers coordinate food, hospitality, registration, and host dozens of attendees from colleges and universities throughout the region. Our inaugural conference in 2010 was supported by a student engagement grant from the Davis Foundation. Since 2011, funding for this initiative has been provided through the Office of Institutional Advancement and the Canavan Family Endowment. We are deeply indebted to the Canavan family for their continued support, which fosters a lively debate about health policy and medical ethics at Providence College each Spring.



In recent years, our annual conference has attracted a wide range of students from colleges and universities across the nation. Conference panels featured presentations by students from Brandeis University, Brown University, University of California-Los Angeles, Connecticut College, University of Houston, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, University of New Hampshire, Providence College, Sarah Lawrence College, Stonehill College, Tufts University, Yale University. Presenters will have the opportunity to meet dozens of students with similar interests and to hear a variety of papers on historical and contemporary issues in health care. Last year's program included 21 papers, organized into seven themed panels. A limited number of travel grants to assist students from outside the region are available.

**Digital Publishing**

An [online repository](#) of student presentations from past conferences can be found at the PC Library's Digital Commons site. Papers are organized by panel topic. Each year, we will add student papers to this site, providing students with the ability to share their work with a wider audience beyond those in attendance at the conference. Presenters interested in publishing their papers online should contact [Hallee Posey](#), the College's Digital Publishing Services Coordinator.

**5th Annual Undergraduate Conference on Health and Society**

**Saturday, April 12, 2014**  
8:30am-4:30pm

**Proposals due January 31, 2014**

The Health Policy and Management Program invites advanced undergraduates to submit paper proposals for our fifth annual undergraduate conference to be held on the Providence College campus on Saturday, April 12, 2014.

The subject of this interdisciplinary conference is "Health and Society," and papers from all areas of inquiry are welcome, especially Anthropology, Biomedical Ethics, Health Care Management, History, Literature, Political Science, Public Health, and Sociology.

Abstracts will be peer-reviewed on a competitive basis. The conference format is an oral presentation of 15 minutes in length with a faculty moderator and discussant. Inquiries and 250-word abstracts should be submitted via email by January 31, 2014 to [pchealthpolicyconference@gmail.com](mailto:pchealthpolicyconference@gmail.com).

For additional information about conference parking, directions, multimedia facilities, and lodging please see our [Information for Participants](#) page.

All participants must complete a registration form confirming their attendance at the conference.

A copy of our conference poster can be downloaded here to share with interested faculty and students.

On-campus funding from the Davis Educational Foundation was not renewable after the conference's first year. This is a common problem for many grant programs, which often provide seed money for new initiatives but not ongoing operating expenses. After our inaugural conference, HPM faculty scrambled to identify new funding sources for future events. In the months after our inaugural conference in 2010, faculty continued to search for both internal and external funding sources for future conferences. The connections with the fundraising staff established during the previous year's strategic planning process proved to be an invaluable resource, as Institutional Advancement staff explored potential on-campus funding through the College's endowed funds. The Canavan Family Fund in Medical Ethics, an endowment to support lectures and other programming on medical ethics that had not received requests for disbursements in several years, soon emerged as a viable option. The fundraising team reached out to the donor about the possibility of using this endowment for a different purpose; since the inaugural conference included several papers on biomedical ethics, the Canavan family readily embraced the notion of supporting the undergraduate conference. The request was approved, and an annual tradition at Providence College was born. Students do not have a role in securing funding for the conference; the behind-the-scenes process of writing grants for on-campus funding is left to faculty. Faculty and the program's graduate assistant also handle all registration materials, processing fees, space reservations, catering, and printing. Since 2012, Institutional Advancement staff approved grants of more than \$1,600 annually to fund this event. Consistent with the intent of the donor's bequest to the College, each conference features at least one panel session exploring themes in biomedical ethics.

The cost of our annual conference on Health and Society also increased in recent years in response to growing interest from students from outside of New England. Beginning in its second year, the HPM program dedicated a portion of its registration fees to fund travel grants for out-of-state attendees. In subsequent years, requests for funding through the College endowment also included the cost of travel grants for out-of-state students. The number and size of travel grants each year depends on both the number of student requests for assistance and the cost of travel and accommodations. In some years, few students have applied for assistance, allowing the program to provide significant support for a few students' travel expenses. In other years, the program paid for area hotel charges directly billed to the college for multiple students. After three years of funding, the program now allocates a maximum of \$800 to defray the cost of student travel, funded equally by registration fees and grant endowment funds.

## COMPLETING THE RESEARCH CYCLE: PUBLISHING AND ARCHIVING STUDENT WORK

Both the higher education and business communities recognize the importance of written and oral communication skills as critical graduate attributes (Boyer Commission, 1998; AAC&U, 2013). As a result, college and university healthcare administration programs should embrace a shift from didactic instruction to engagement-based pedagogy to better prepare graduates for careers in an ever-evolving healthcare system. By valuing undergraduate scholarship and emphasizing the importance of publishing undergraduate research, health administration programs will equip students with essential skills for lifelong learning and also encourage students to engage in public scholarly debates about health policy issues in the peer-reviewed literature. Formally presenting research results also initiates students into a community of practice, familiarizing them with the behaviors and methods used by researchers at teaching hospitals, medical schools, public policy think tanks, and other healthcare institutions. Indeed, presenting research in a formal conference setting and subsequent publishing is a natural extension (if not an expectation) of completing the research cycle (Case, 2007; Walkington, 2008). Since 2012, Indonesia's education ministry has gone so far as to require that all undergraduates, graduates, and postgraduates publish as a fulfillment of their degree (Rochmyaningsih, 2012). Working with faculty and faculty-mentored students, many academic libraries have sought to assist their institutions meet graduate written and oral communication proficiency goals by developing institutionally hosted student communication/publication platforms and publication support services.

Beginning in the late 1990s, academic libraries began to leverage emerging digital asset-management and online publishing technologies, and implemented a variety of institutional repository (IR) and online journal publishing systems (e.g., DSpace, EPrints, bepress *Digital Commons*, Fedora, Open Journal System) to archive and distribute scholarly work. Local IRs facilitate capturing, publishing, and archiving institutional intellectual output at the source and position themselves to support greater open access to scholarships (Crow, 2002). In 2005, the Providence College Phillips Memorial Library+Commons, along with other members of the Higher Education Library and Information Network (HELIN) Consortium, received a grant from the Davis Educational Foundation to support the implementation of an institutional repository (IR) and online journal publishing system, Bepress *Digital Commons*. Shortly thereafter, the Library+Commons established the Digital Publishing Services (DPS) department to pursue and investigate new scholarly collaborations and publishing models, prioritizing support for local faculty and student scholarship and creative expression (Caprio & Landry, 2013).

After the Undergraduate Conference on Health and Society's inaugural year, HPM faculty partnered with Digital Publishing Services staff in the College's Phillips Memorial Library+Commons to make use of its existing online repository to host student papers presented at the conference. The resulting publication site - created collaboratively between DPS staff and HPM program faculty - used the *Digital Commons* "Conference & Events" template to mirror the intellectual organization of the conference itself (see Figure 2). With a fixed URL, a brief record page provides conference paper metadata (e.g., author, title, and abstract), a PDF download button, and social media outlet options for sharing citation information (Figure 3). The brief record page may also include links to system-managed supplemental files, which may be of any file format (e.g., .exe, .mov, .jpg, .xlsx) and can be used to provide additional support to the primary document's argument. All student presenters are invited (but not required) to submit their papers for publication in the *Digital Commons*. The timeframe for publishing papers online depends on the receipt of a signed permissions agreement from each student. Library staff follow up with students in the weeks following the conference. All students receive a copy of the permissions agreement with their formal letter of acceptance, but not all participants respond in a timely fashion. In some cases, papers are available online within a week of the conference, while others may not be posted until months later.

Figures 2 & 3  
The *Digital Commons* website

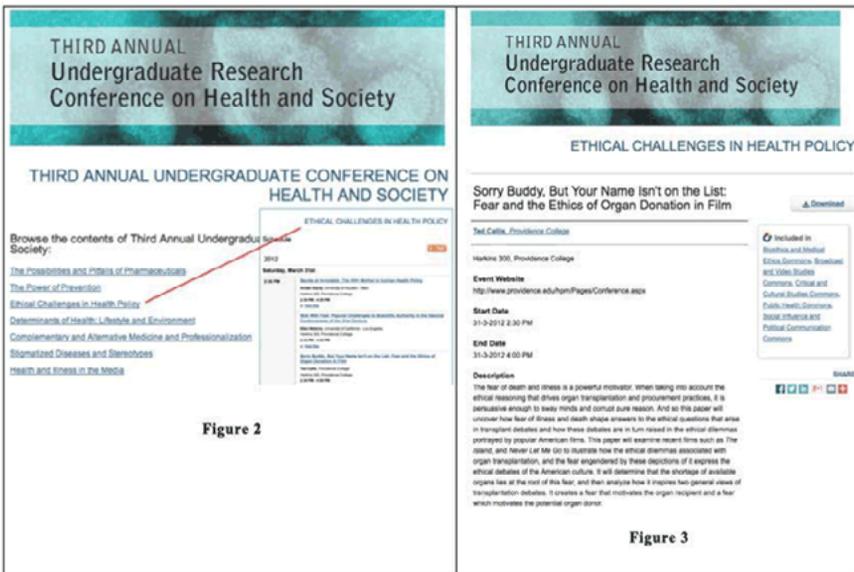


Figure 2

Figure 3

The publication process for each year's conference is now clearly delineated. Once the conference program is finalized, DPS staff receives a list of student presenters' names and email addresses to send an electronic invitation to submit their papers following the conference. Students are provided with instructions for submitting papers for publication through the *Digital Commons* "Annual Undergraduate Research Conference on Health and Society" series. DPS facilitates paper submissions, including a student-author publication agreement developed in consultation with the HPM faculty. The email invitation requests an abstract and final paper as a Word file. The *Digital Commons* ingest process automatically converts the Word file into a text-searchable PDF. The email invitation also includes Library+Commons-requested publishing rights within the body text. Students retain copyright, but the Library+Commons requests a "non-exclusive license to archive and make accessible [the] work in whole or in part in any format now or hereafter known" (Appendix B). Regarding reuse of their conference papers, which will be readily available on the web, students are asked to agree to a Creative Commons Attribution/Non-Commercial reuse license. Students, as copyright owners, may request that their papers be removed from the *Digital Commons* conference series at any time. In order for DPS staff to process and publish conference papers to the "Annual Undergraduate Research Conference on Health and Society" series, students must agree to all the terms presented in the email invitation; copies of student emails are saved for any future reference by both parties (i.e., Library+Commons or student-author).

Publishing student work in a publicly accessible digital repository offers numerous advantages for students. Unlike faculty, students have fewer institutionally supported opportunities to present or publish their scholarship. Most paper capstone theses are sequestered in an institution's physical archive with little hope of being read by anyone beyond the project supervisor or supervising committee (local library circulation statistics support this). In contrast, publishing student work through the *Digital Commons* affords greater public access to student work for employers, graduate schools, and other external constituencies. Furthermore, since *Digital Commons* is an OAI (Open Archives Initiative) compliant system, it provides online system-enhanced visibility through Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Web search engines are able to fully index conference paper metadata and text, and prioritize institutional repository content in ranking algorithms. Stable record and conference paper URLs provide a means for students to share their scholarship with faculty and peers or reference papers (with direct links) on a resume or graduate program application.

In the three years that the Library+Commons published student work from the "Annual Undergraduate Research Conference on Health and Society," students' papers have garnered a high number of unique views and downloads;

several have recorded more than 300 downloads. In addition, the prospect of publishing papers in an online, open-access format led many students to further revise and refine their conference papers, even though their papers had already been peer-reviewed, accepted, and presented at the conference. In short, participating in the “Annual Undergraduate Research Conference on Health and Society” and publishing their paper through *Digital Commons* allows students to benefit both from local face-to-face interactions and also makes their scholarship available online to a much wider public audience.

## CONCLUSION

As “an emergent pedagogy in higher education,” mentored undergraduate research requires academic communities to establish active, formal partnerships to support such activities (Stamatoplos 2009, p. 235). By creating new opportunities for students to present and share their research, undergraduate conferences support several complementary, yet distinct goals by melding undergraduate research, presentation skills, information literacy, and scholarly communication (Gilman, 2013; Davis-Kahl, 2012; Association of College and Research Libraries, 2013; Stamatoplos, 2009).

With each passing year, our undergraduate conference on health and society at Providence College has grown more diverse geographically and topically, drawing presenters from around the United States and Canada to present their work. The benefits of peer-reviewed undergraduate conferences are numerous for both students and faculty. First, conferences raise expectations for student work by providing presenters with a meaningful professional socialization experience. Since student papers will be subject to peer-review and also presented to a diverse audience of students and faculty representing many different institutions, participating students have a strong incentive to revise their work. Second, conferences offer students an opportunity to publish their work in an online digital repository, thereby making it accessible to potential employers, graduate schools, family, and friends. Conference papers, therefore, are not merely an assignment, but rather showcase students’ best work. Third, departmental or institutional level, undergraduate research conferences can raise the profile of departments with key on-campus constituencies by generating positive news coverage that showcases student work for administrators and alumni. Finally, hosting a conference – and archiving student papers – opens doors for faculty and students to network with colleagues from similar programs.

Hosting a conference is not a “one size fits all” matter. Institutions can host such events inexpensively, or can add various amenities (e.g., food, programs, posters, web publication, etc.) as resources permit. Regardless of the format,

however, organizing an undergraduate research conference affords future health administrators and policymakers an engaging, hands-on opportunity to polish critical thinking skills, hone presentation skills, and network with colleagues in a supportive environment.

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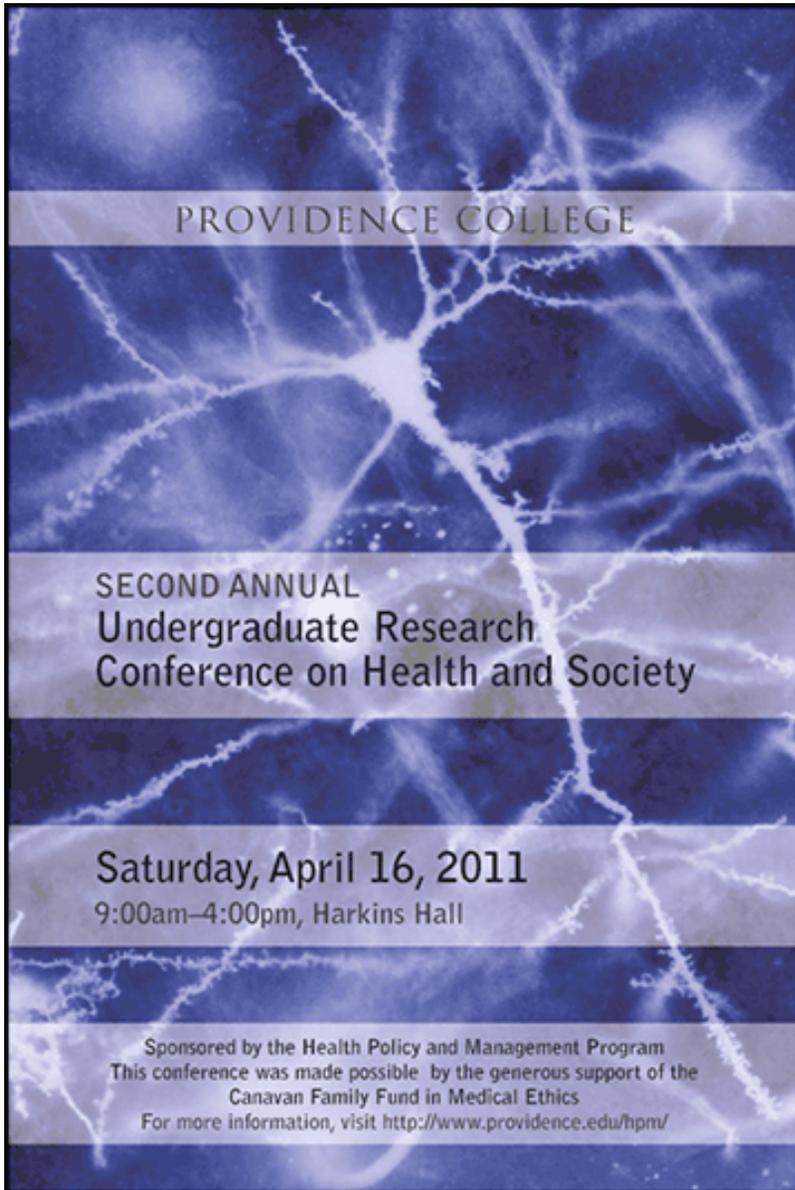
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APPENDIX A

Sample Poster



PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

SECOND ANNUAL  
Undergraduate Research  
Conference on Health and Society

Saturday, April 16, 2011  
9:00am–4:00pm, Harkins Hall

Sponsored by the Health Policy and Management Program  
This conference was made possible by the generous support of the  
Canavan Family Fund in Medical Ethics  
For more information, visit <http://www.providence.edu/hpm/>

## APPENDIX B

### *Digital Commons Publishing Invitation and Instructions*

Good morning, and congratulations on your participation in the Fourth Annual Conference on Health and Society!

I am writing to invite you to publish your conference paper through Providence College's Digital Commons repository. The Digital Commons repository includes scholarship contributed by both faculty and students. The content of the repository is made openly available and highlights exceptional, creative and scholarly work. You can view paper's from last year's Conference on Health and Society here: <http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/auchs/2012/>.

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2. Include the following statement in the body of the email:
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If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me.

Thank you, and congratulations again!