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## **Abstract**

At Simmons GSLIS, a collaboration between the GSLIS Tech Lab and members of ASIS&T@Simmons has led to the creation of a highly successful series of student-run workshops on emerging technologies. This presentation details the series, its evolution, successes, and challenges, and offers suggestions about implementing similar programs at other institutions.

## **Presentation outline**

### *1. Statement of the problem or issue.*

The Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) draws students from a large range of backgrounds and with greatly varying degrees of technical knowledge. How can technology topics be taught to an audience with such a wide range of interests and backgrounds? At GSLIS, the GSLIS Tech Lab and the Simmons chapter of the American Society of Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T@Simmons) have teamed up to create a technology workshop series. The workshops are conceived of, developed, and taught by Tech Lab student workers and ASIS&T@Simmons members and cover a variety of technology topics.

### *2. Description of activity, project, or solution.*

Simmons GSLIS has a dedicated technology lab known as the GSLIS Tech Lab, managed by Linnea Johnson, assistant director of information technology for GSLIS. During all of its operating hours, the Tech Lab is staffed by student lab assistants known as Technology Reference Assistants (TRAs).

The Simmons chapter of ASIS&T is very active in the GSLIS community and has won several national awards. In the spring of 2006, a new slate of student leaders assumed leadership of the chapter. One of these was Alison Cody, the Tech Lab's Lead TRA.

In the spring of 2006, a conversation between Linnea Johnson, Alison Cody, and Jennifer Lege (chair of ASIS&T@Simmons) led to the creation of a workshop series focused on technology topics. Alison Cody was appointed workshop coordinator. For the first round of the workshop series six topics were chosen:

- How to Set Up an RSS Aggregator
- Social Bookmarking & Tagging
- Podcasting & Internet Radio
- HTML & CSS
- Wikis
- Buying Technology Gadgets
- Microsoft Office Suite (PowerPoint, Word, Excel)

Each workshop was scheduled for two sessions. Volunteer teachers were recruited from the membership of ASIS&T@Simmons and the TRA staff. Volunteers were given very little in the way of formal guidelines regarding what content to cover and how to develop it – the hope was that this freedom would foster sessions that would harness the enthusiasm of the instructor as much as possible. Instructors were encouraged to include hands-on content, references for additional information and exploration, and handouts when appropriate.

The workshop series was met with great enthusiasm from the GSLIS community. Students and faculty attended the workshops, and conversations between instructors and attendees throughout the semester indicated that the workshops were a valuable resource for students. Workshop attendance for the first semester totaled 72 participants, with a high of 17 and a low of 3. On April 25, as the series was in full swing, Michael Stephens mentioned the workshop series in a post on the widely-respected American Library Association TechSource Blog:

“On the 2.0 Job Description (Part 2): LIS Students in a 2.0 World”  
<http://www.techsource.ala.org/blog/2006/04/on-the-20-job-description-part-2-lis-students-in-a-20-world.html>

Candy Schwartz, co-editor, Library & Information Science Research at Simmons College GSLIS, wrote to say the GSLIS students are teaching social software and more "for the whole student community, not just one

class." She urged me to visit the course listings at <http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/techlab/workshops.shtml>. Classes are co-sponsored by the Tech Lab and the student chapter of the American Society of Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T). Each is an hour of hands-on experience in the lab, with discussion and a resource list takeaway. "If this flies," Candy said, "they will probably do it every semester."

Due to its success, the workshop series was expanded for the Fall 2006 semester. Some of the instructors changed, and everyone has been encouraged to use the materials from spring semester and edit or change them as they see fit. In addition, during the call for volunteer instructors, a GSLIS student who spent 15 years working in the field of user interface design offered to conduct workshops on that topic. More instructors who were not TRAs or ASIS&T board members also volunteered. Fifteen workshops, broken into two series, are being offered for a total of 30 sessions:

#### Tips & Tricks Series:

- Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Managing Digital Photos
- Using Macs
- Websites with Dreamweaver
- Navigating Photoshop

#### Emerging Technologies Series:

- XML
- Wikis
- Google Earth
- XHTML & CSS
- User Interface Design
- Podcasting & Internet Radio
- Setting Up an RSS Aggregator
- Tagging & Social Bookmarking

For more details on the workshops themselves, please see <http://web.simmons.edu/~cody1/workshops.htm>

Downloadable versions of workshop materials are available at <http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/techlab/howto-info.shtml#et>

As of this writing, halfway through the Fall 2006 semester, total attendance has reached 120 (including several alumni of the program and Simmons College staff). As the series progresses, handouts are being posted to the Tech Lab's Download Center (<http://my.simmons.edu/gslis/techlab/howto-info.shtml#et>) so

students at the Mount Holyoke Campus and those who are unable to attend sessions can walk themselves through the sessions.

## **Problems & Solutions**

In Spring 2006, workshop instructors were responsible for publicity—creating and posting flyers and sending e-mail announcements. This proved to be an unreliable method. In one case, due to an oversight, the instructors did not do any publicity at all, and attendance at their sessions was extremely low—no attendance at one, and only three students at the other. However, workshops where the publicity was done consistently and early had higher attendance. For the Fall 2006 workshop series responsibility for workshop publicity fell to the workshop coordinator, Alison Cody. A dedicated email account was created for the workshop series and a system of email announcements and posted flyers was developed. This helped to ensure that most workshops were well-attended.

One workshop from the Spring 2006 series was dropped in Fall 2006 – “Buying a Technology Gadget.” The topic did not lend itself well to a workshop format. A workshop first offered in Fall 2006 may not be re-run; as of this writing the “Managing Digital Photos” workshop had only been offered once, but the topic proved hard to get a handle on, and some attendees seemed bored during the session.

During the Spring 2006 semester TRAs were required to work on at least one workshop (out of 11 instructors, 7 were TRAs or full-time Tech Lab staff). A few TRAs were not interested in doing so, and as a result the sections of workshops that they presented lacked some of the enthusiasm and depth that other sections had. In the Fall 2006 semester, this requirement was dropped. However, most TRAs did volunteer for one or more workshops (out of 14 instructors, 6 were TRAs or other Tech Lab staff). Making instruction voluntary helped to insure that instructors were truly interested in the topic and willing to present.

In the Fall 2006 semester, more workshops were proposed, and it was harder to find enough volunteers to serve as instructors for all of them. In fact, the series was announced and dates and times were released before all of the sessions had coverage. Within a couple of weeks, volunteers were found for some of these workshops (most of which were scheduled for later in the semester), and they did not need to be rescheduled. In the future, we are uncertain as to whether we will drop workshops from the series if we are unable to find additional help. Most of the

instructors from Fall 2006 all semester workshops will still be able to present, so this will likely be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

### *3. Outcome.*

Overall, the workshop series has met the objective we set out: to help those in the GSLIS community who are interested become more familiar with various technologies that they may encounter. To collect feedback more systematically, two short surveys were created in the Fall 2006 semester: a six-question survey for the Tips & Tricks Series, and an 8-question survey for the Emerging Technologies Series. Attendees at all workshops were asked to include their email address on a sign-in sheet, and were emailed shortly after the workshop with a link to the appropriate survey.

As of this writing, the series is still in progress and final survey results are not available. However, preliminary survey returns indicate that most of the workshops were well-received, and that the fact they are offered at all is appreciated. A common theme throughout the open-ended questions so far is that respondents would have preferred more hands-on work and less background information on the topic at hand. In addition, some attendees (particularly those who attended the Microsoft Office Suite workshops) asked for different levels of workshops—basic, intermediate and advanced. This may be beyond the scope of what we are able to offer, but is worth considering in case we can address this desire in another way. One idea that has briefly been discussed is working with the Pottruck Technology Resource Center, Simmons College's technology training office. The PTRC already offers different levels of instruction for common software applications, including the Office Suite. Working with them to host these workshops in the GSLIS Tech Lab, at times that mesh well with the GSLIS course schedule, may fill this need for some students.

### *4. Importance or relevance to other institutions.*

The overarching principal of the workshop series can be summed up as community-involved learning. The workshops are conceived of, developed, and taught by students, for the GSLIS community. Workshop attendees gain knowledge about emerging technologies in a non-threatening environment, and the students who develop and teach the workshops learn curriculum development, presentation, and user instruction skills. The community-oriented nature of the workshop series helps to build a sense of community in the large GSLIS student body. The workshop series also helps to

raise the profile of ASIS&T@Simmons, resulting in increasing membership and activity within the group.

This model of community-involved learning is easily extensible to other situations. In fact, similar principles were behind the creation of the first Simmons Skill Share, a one-day collaborative conference hosted in September 2006 by the Simmons chapters of ASIS&T and the Progressive Librarians' Guild. Once again, students were solicited to teach short workshops on topics of their expertise. In this case, the focus was on librarianship rather than technology.

### **Suggested Audience**

This presentation will be of particular interest to those with an interest in technology instruction and collaborative learning experiences. Although our workshop series takes place in the setting of an educational institution, the general principles of the series make it applicable to other settings such as public libraries and community organizations.

Please note: we feel that this topic would best be presented as a track presentation, but would be amenable to a poster session should the program committee find that a more appropriate option.