

# Emerging Technologies, Emerging Teachers: Collaborative Workshops at Simmons GSLIS

Alison Cody  
ASIS&T@Simmons Chair  
Lead Technology Reference Assistant,  
GSLIS Tech Lab  
MLIS Candidate (December '07)  
alison.cody@simmons.edu

Ellen Wilson  
ASIST@Simmons Vice-chair  
Technology Reference Assistant, GSLIS Tech Lab  
MLIS Candidate (May '07)  
ellen.wilson@simmons.edu

## 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 will detail the origin, evolution, successes, and challenges of the workshops and offer suggestions for implementing similar programs at other institutions.

## Background

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 Technology 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.

*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 whom was Alison Cody, a Tech Lab TRA.*

## Beginnings of the Workshop Series (Spring 2006)

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 at 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 ALA 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 that 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."

### **Fall 2006 Workshop Series**

Due to its success, the workshop series was expanded for the Fall 2006 semester. Some of the instructors changed, and new instructors were 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, were offered for a total of 30 sessions:

#### **Tips & Tricks Series:**

- Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, in three separate sessions)
- 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

### **Problems and 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.

During the spring semester TRAs were required to work on at least one workshop. 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 semester, this requirement was dropped. However, most TRAs did volunteer for one or more workshops. Making instruction voluntary helped to insure that instructors were truly interested in the topic and willing to present.

One workshop was dropped in Fall 2006 – “Buying a Technology Gadget.” The topic did not lend itself well to a workshop format. However, more workshops were proposed, and it was harder to find enough volunteers to instruct 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 semester workshops will still be able to present, so this will likely be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

### **Spring 2007 Workshop Series**

The Spring 2007 series is currently in full swing. The offerings have been scaled back slightly from the fall semester:

- Design Patterns
- PowerPoint
- Wikis
- Websites with Dreamweaver
- XHTML & CSS (two parts)
- Google Earth
- Navigating Photoshop
- Podcasting
- XML
- Tagging & Social Bookmarking
- Search Engines
- Setting Up an RSS Aggregator

A workshop first offered in Fall 2006 was dropped – “Managing Digital Photos.” The topic proved hard to get a handle on, and some attendees seemed bored during the session.

Other changes this semester include the adoption of a registration system, using software set up by the Tech Lab. Those who plan to attend workshops are encouraged to RSVP in advance, though walk-in attendance is still welcome. The goal of the registration system is to avoid having instructors come to campus only to discover that no one comes for their workshop. Forty-eight hours before a workshop session, if there are fewer than three registrants the instructor is given the option to cancel the workshop, and the GSLIS community is notified of the cancellation.

Of the 9 sessions that have been scheduled to date, 3 have been cancelled due to low registration. For those sessions that have been held, there were 40 registrations, and 30 students attended. Based on sign-in sheets, it seems that in general, a couple of students who register do not wind up taking the workshop, and one or two who did not register arrive for the session.

### **Outcomes**

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 be encountering. To collect feedback more systematically, two short surveys were created in the fall 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.

For Fall 2006, workshop attendance was 143 students. Survey returns indicate that most of the workshops were well-received and that the fact they are offered is appreciated. A common theme throughout the open-ended questions was 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 is beyond the scope of what we are able to offer, but we are keeping it in mind in hopes that we can address this desire in another way.

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.