

## Getting Design Students Involved For An Invigorated Open Access Week

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At the [University of Alberta Libraries](#), we've begun what we hope will become a tradition. For the past two years, we've included students in the University's Department of [Art & Design](#) in our Open Access (OA) Week efforts. Students have created two important parts of OA Week: a visual identity for our campaign and an exhibition of design installations about Open Access.



*Tape art for Open Access Week 2013.  
Below, installations from Open Access Week 2014.  
All photos by Hanne Pearce*

Our 2013 OA Week exhibit featured tape art created by graduate students Devaki Joshi and Justin Pritchard in our busy Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) library. (Four

shades of vinyl electrical tape, to be precise.) Inspired by this striking work, we enlarged the project in 2014. Beginning on the first day of classes in September, more than twenty design students in an undergraduate Visual Communications Design course took up the challenge, first conducting visual identity work, then creating an exhibition of fully-realized, interactive installations. The exhibition opened during OA Week in October and ran into November.

As the subject librarian who works with Art & Design, I've shared additional details about this work in a few places, such as the [Library as Incubator Project](#) and the Art Libraries Society of North America [conference](#). This post is new. It's for you if you find yourself considering something new, perhaps something more student-determined than usual, for your OA Week this year.



I need to mention the most important prerequisite for this project, which is a respectful, mutually appreciative relationship between people in the library system and people in the Art & Design Department. My predecessor was a devoted subject specialist, and after he

retired I worked to expand on the departmental connections he developed. I also run a popular exhibition program in the atrium and foyer spaces in the HSS library. We host more than a dozen exhibitions each year, always including several that showcase the work of Art & Design students.

I share this background because the first thing we did to try to get design students involved with OA Week was to approach faculty members and ask their advice. We didn't want to take advantage of students' efforts or overwhelm their workloads. Artists and designers receive frequent requests to work on campaigns. "You'll be paid in exposure" is a [grim cliché](#) for good reason. Our faculty colleagues identified which

students could perhaps become involved with the project and advised us how to proceed. Our ability to initiate this preliminary conversation rested on an established relationship. We were in a position to ask.

We had to consider what else (in *addition* to exposure) we could do to recognize students' hard work. I advise you to do this, too. Can you offer book dedications, or involve students in choosing some titles for the library's collection? Can you cater an exhibition reception during Open Access Week, inviting the public? Can you cover students' materials costs? Can you offer students an enduring creative and intellectual challenge?

The answer to that last question is fundamental, and it should be yes, no matter the other circumstances. What can make this experience significant for students? In my experience, the answer can be expressed as: preparation, organization, authenticity, and awareness-raising.



### **Preparation**

We prepared for Fall 2014 — the first time OA Week was a community campaign within a design course — throughout the preceding summer. (I'm using "course" in the North American sense of an individual class within a degree program.) We

assembled resources that could help introduce students to Open Access, such as [Open Access Explained!](#), [How Open Access Empowered a 16-Year-Old to Make Cancer Breakthrough](#), and [Open Access 101](#). Students needed to begin grappling with the concept on the very first day of classes.

We also prepared by communicating thoroughly about how OA Week would feature within the course. My colleague [Denise Koufogiannakis](#) and I, the librarians present in the classroom, had to learn about the workings of a design course, about disciplinary practices and typical expectations. Denise and I assumed the role of the “community client.” To that end we asked for, and received, patient coaching from design professor Bonnie Sadler Takach and from course instructors Judy Armstrong and Gillian Harvey.

## Organization

Our Scholarly Communications Working Group (SCWG), a library-system-wide team, was instrumental in giving students an organized experience with minimal hurdles. As students discovered not just Open Access but also all of Scholarly Communication, they had many questions — “the University pays how much for a journal??” — and not a lot of time to wait for answers. Denise, representing the SCWG, responded thoroughly and promptly. SCWG chair Leah Vanderjagt, our institutional repository services librarian, organized events around the exhibition and oversaw the OA Week budget. As the HSS exhibition coordinator, I provided students with floorplans, the specifications of our fixtures and equipment, and my expectations for taking care of the space.



This team approach enabled us to provide students with detailed, timely support. I devoted about an hour each week between August and November 2014, not counting additional time in the classroom, to manage my share of the project.



## **Authenticity**

This collaboration was what designers call a “community campaign.” As such, it was fully acceptable that Denise and I occasionally experienced uncertainty. We gave students a brief presentation about OA on the first day of classes, and then we returned about a month later to receive the visual identity proposals. Students presented about a dozen. Each proposal is a plan, a “pitch,” for representing OA Week visually: concepts, colours, typefaces, and so on. We had to choose just one to put into production on banners and in digital ads (see below). It wasn’t easy. The variety took us aback and we found it challenging to differentiate among the stronger proposals. This made us typical community clients, people who are not designers, with whom designers work all the time.

Design students sometimes do more hypothetical work, so it was significant for them to work in real time on a real campaign. Also, we gave them an even rarer request, which was to design and build interactive, three-dimensional installations. We gave the class an \$800 materials budget to cover all of the installations. Students had to work together to manage expenses. This required researching materials, communicating with classmates and providers, and adjusting plans as necessary. One group of students priced out their desired materials and discovered a price tag of several thousand dollars. They returned to their research and eventually brought their costs down to fit within the shared budget. Other groups borrowed and reused materials; Drama Department colleagues loaned a wheeled mirror they could spare for the duration. These complex, and eventually public, circumstances gave design students a realistic installation experience.



### Awareness-raising

Based on their questions and comments throughout the process, and based on the knowledge evident in their final installations, it's safe to say that that students improved their understanding of Open Access by working on this campaign. As problem

solvers, they had to contend with the concept in order to be able to consider how to communicate it to their peers on campus. Students created nine installations grounded in nine different concepts. These demonstrated creativity, yes, but they also compellingly illustrated diverse perceptions of Open Access.

The [nine concepts](#) were:

- a floor maze; different paths led to a locked door (Paywall!) and an open door (Open Access!)
- a Discovery-channel-style documentary about hyenas; the satirical voiceover described the predators (publishers) and their prey (authors)
- a mirror; we were invited to consider our own role in making scholarly discovery open
- a string art pegboard; we were invited to consider connections, and how they are enabled by open scholarship
- a social media head-in-the-hole photo board; we were invited to take our picture and write a “status update” about OA Week
- an [anamorph](#) requiring a person to stand in exactly the correct place in order to see it; we were encouraged to examine the importance of perspective

- a massive set of 3D glasses highlighting the visibility and distortion of information caused by access issues
- a post-it-note mosaic mural asking “Who Is Generation Open;” we were invited to contribute our own words about OA on a note
- a board game consisting of floor tiles; we were invited to choose a path, open or closed, and read about the implications

We’re having another go at this project again this year. In fact, we’re going to document the process on this site, so watch this space. We’ll make the student experience even better, and we’ll assess and document the project even more thoroughly. We’re already looking forward to what another group of designers will create.

If you're contemplating a similar undertaking, it's not too late in the summer to get it rolling. Reach out to your Design faculty colleagues to inquire whether they need any community campaigns for Fall courses. If they do, ask what they need in order to put OA Week under consideration — a meeting? A proposal?

If OA Week can't be incorporated into a Design course, you could put out a call through student email lists for volunteers to contribute to OA Week. Some design students may be seeking additional experience for their portfolios and CVs.

Either way, assemble a team of library staff to support the work. List unambiguously the items you're requesting. You'd like a banner? What dimensions, file size, file type? What copy (words) and logos will be used? That's up to you. Clarity is critical. The other unambiguous list to create is the one indicating how you will support, acknowledge, and reward this work.

All the best with your own creative collaborations.

*Below: Our 2014 visual identity in one of the ads created by designer Michael Parillas*



