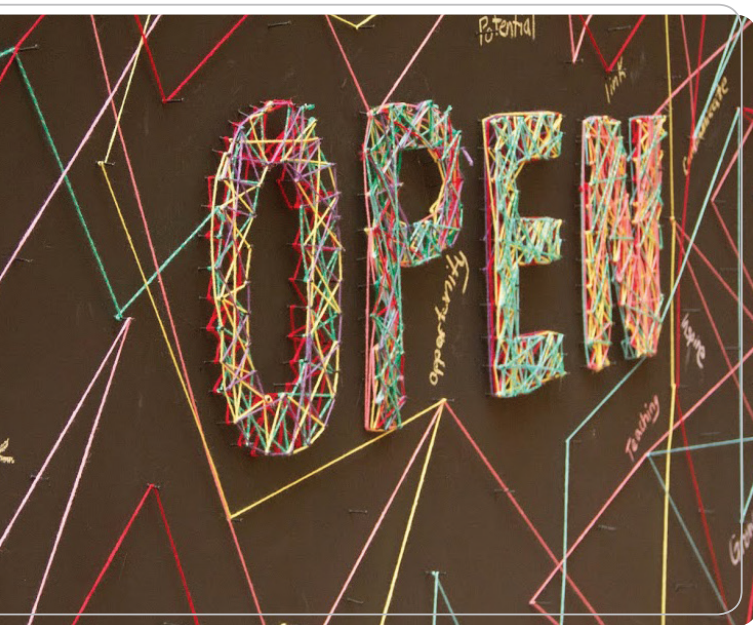This poster presents the process of, and results from, a collaboration between librarians and the students and instructors in two visual communications design (VCD) courses at the University of Alberta. Through this collaboration, students created awareness campaign materials and an interactive design exhibition for the University's 2014 Open Access Week celebrations.

For the student designers, working on Open Access Week offered a rare opportunity to take their coursework past the proposal stage into the realities of building and exhibiting. All along, as their understanding grew and deepened, students wrestled creatively and provocatively with the concept of Open Access (OA). For the librarians, and our library system, the exhibition hugely enriched our conventional OA Week offerings — lectures and discussions — with a popular, unique event that was expressive, experimental, and student-driven.

Background

The University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) is the second-largest research library system in Canada.[1] In addition to its ongoing focus on traditional collections and services, UAL has placed emphasis on growing and leading in new areas, such as digitization, web archiving, research data management, and open access.
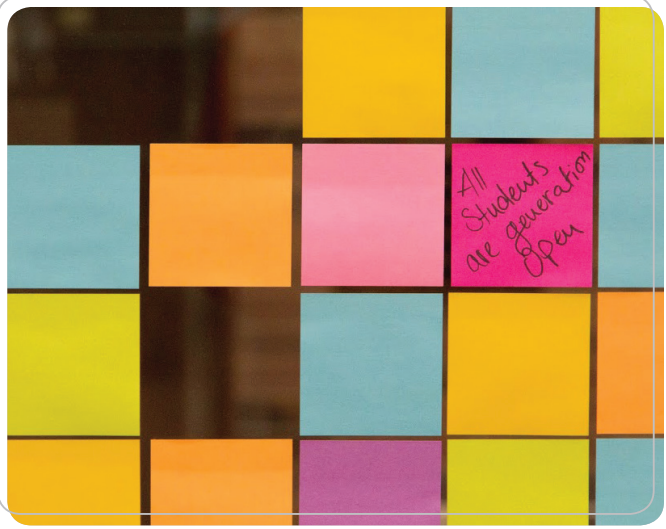
UAL's support for open access (OA) has involved both advocacy, such as annual OA Week events, and also large-scale policies and projects. For example, in December 2014, UAL expanded its no-cost Open Journal Systems hosting service by offering it to any OA journal in Canada, whether University-affiliated or not.

Meanwhile, the UAL's Humanities and Social Sciences library, the Rutherford library, has operated an exhibition program since early 2010. The program enlivens our spaces and most crucially, gives voice to students in the library. The exhibitions, up to twenty each year, are coordinated by the Art & Design librarian. Any instructor or student group may book one of Rutherford's spaces to display student work. Most exhibitions originate in the department of Art & Design, but we have also exhibited work from disciplines such as Gender Studies, Modern Languages, and Circumpolar Studies. Rutherford is the busiest campus library, guaranteeing public engagement with exhibitions.

Process

In July 2014, I approached the faculty colleague who coordinates the Visual Communication Design program, Bonnie Sadler Takach, to inquire about design students working on Open Access Week 2014, October 20-26. Bonnie responded immediately and enthusiastically. She suggested incorporating Open Access Week as an awareness campaign project for two sections of Design 493, "Concepts and Systems in Visual Communication." This is an advanced undergraduate course in which students translate complex ideas into visual concepts and develop their project management skills.

Throughout the summer, Bonnie, fellow librarian Denise Koufogiannakis, members of UAL's Scholarly Communi-
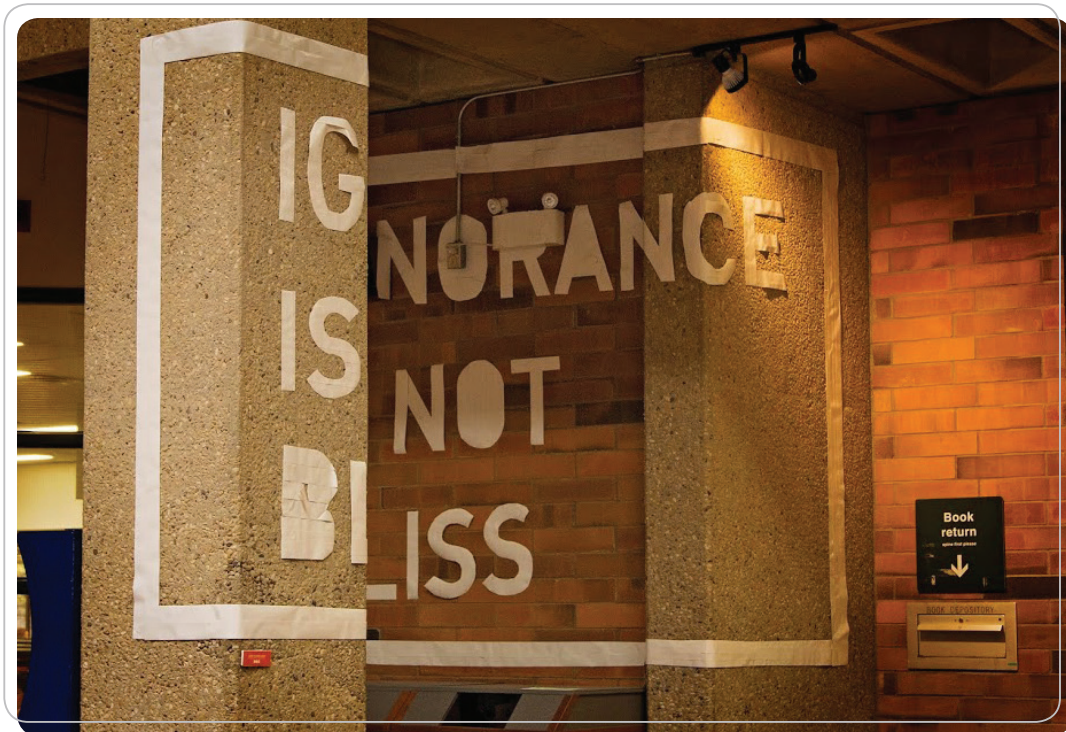

cations Working Group, and I worked to assemble the resources students would use to familiarize themselves with Open Access, as well as the project sheet containing the parameters for the design work. In late summer, Design 493's instructors, Gillian Harvey and Judy Armstrong, got involved, helping firm up the expectations, guidelines, and timelines. On the first day of classes in September 2014, Denise and I, acting as the students' "community clients," visited both sections of Design 493 to introduce the project. Immediately, in a rapid prototyping session that awed Denise and me, the students began wrestling with the concept of Open Access. They debated what it means to be "Generation Open," the 2014 OA Week theme.

Students' first challenge was to translate their impressions, interpretations, and analyses into striking visual concepts.

This resulted in a range of compelling visual identity proposals and a difficult choice for Denise and me. We decided to put Michael Parillas' maze proposal into production. We were intrigued by Michael's geometric concept, which implied movement and narrative with an open door.

Having completed their visual identity pitches, students faced an even more significant challenge: to take their Generation Open concepts from proposal to reality, and build installations for the exhibition in Rutherford library. The library system's senior administration played an important role in this process by providing a modest budget for installation materials. This gave students a bit of real-life experience with sourcing and pricing materials and then adapting to stay on budget.

The Generation Open exhibition opened October 20, 2014 and consisted of nine installations. Each incorporated a provocative, interactive metaphor, from mirror to anamorph, from string art to Discovery-Channel-style predatory carnage. The installations invited audiences to consider where academic publications come from, how we get our hands on them, and the barriers and freedoms that influence our experiences with information.

Conclusion

In 2014, poor attendance at our traditional OA Week events, such as lectures, prompted us to discuss whether we might need to make a drastic change, such as moving OA Week to another time of year altogether. By contrast, the Design 493 Generation Open exhibition was a distinguished success, an ephemeral student-led centrepiece for our OA Week. It was widely discussed, including by the students themselves. It was was covered in the University's Fine Arts marketing site, curiousarts.ca, featured on the Library as Incubator

Project, and lauded by the Right to Research Coalition as "incredible" and "inspiring."[2]

This successful collaboration between UAL and VCD did not emerge perfectly-formed from the ether. It was based on a history of good relationships, particularly around Rutherford library's exhibition program. Rutherford has hosted numerous Design exhibitions over the years, providing free high-traffic space for student designers to showcase their work. This shared history enabled me to approach Bonnie and ask whether student designers might set their sights on one of the library system's major annual campaigns. The resulting collaboration was mutually beneficial, and we certainly hope to undertake it again in the future.

1. By number of volumes and other metrics, 2012-2013 ARL Statistics.

2. http://www.curiousarts.ca/generation-open, http://www.libraryasincubatorproject.org/?p=15695, https://twitter.com/R2RC/status/525495713686634496

Design Students
UNLOCK OPEN ACCESS

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LIBRARIES

Sarah Polkinghorne, Art & Design Librarian | University of Alberta, Canada | sarah.polkinghorne@ualberta.ca | sarahpolkinghorne.ca