


Bridging Data through Interlibrary Programming

Zeineb Yousif, BA, MLIS^a; Sara B. Westall, BS, MLIS, MS^b

^aDigital Initiatives Librarian, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, 0009-0009-1106-3289^{ORCID}, zeineb.yousif@und.edu

^aNE/SE Clinical Campus Librarian, School of Medicine and Health Sciences Library Resources, University of North Dakota, Fargo, ND, 0009-0001-1356-5823^{ORCID}, sara.westall@und.edu

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Abstract

The University of North Dakota has an affiliated medical school and law school, each with an independent library. Typically each campus library has created outreach programs specific to their school. In 2025 the University of North Dakota Libraries launched our first collaborative effort at programming for Love Data Week, a yearly international celebration of data established in 2016¹.

Our goal was to offer a suite of programs that gave all patrons the opportunity to engage with data without requiring prior experience or knowledge. We created programs targeting different campus audiences including:

- Interactive data displays (target: patrons passing through the library building, primarily undergraduate students)
- Student data visualization contest (target: undergraduate and graduate students)
- Introductory data management workshops (target: faculty and graduate students)

Background

The University of North Dakota has an affiliated medical school, law school, and environmental research center, each with an independent library. Typically, each library has created outreach programs specific to their service population. In 2025, the University of North Dakota Libraries launched our first collaborative effort at programming for Love Data Week, a yearly international celebration of data established in 2016¹.

Our goal with this program was to increase understanding of data literacy concepts on our campus. In 2023 our State Board of Higher Education passed a policy requiring all state higher education institutions to implement a digital literacy requirement for associate and baccalaureate-level programs². In response, UND Libraries played a central role in integrating digital literacies into our Essential Studies program. Recognizing that data literacy is a critical subset of digital literacy, the Libraries saw an opportunity to strengthen this component for students and researchers alike. Our impression was that data literacy on campus remained low and self-taught, matching wider trends observed in higher education³. We thus aimed to offer a suite of programs that gave all patrons the opportunity to engage with data without requiring prior experience or knowledge. We created programs targeting different campus audiences including:

- Interactive data displays (target: patrons passing through the main library building, primarily undergraduate students)
- Student data visualization contest (target: undergraduate and graduate students)
- Introductory data management workshops (target: faculty and graduate students)

Interactive Data Displays

Our interactive data displays aimed to provide fun, low-stakes engagement, allowing patrons to contribute to public art and in doing so learn that data can be visualized in a variety of ways. Patrons added to the displays by responding to simple prompts, such as sharing concepts that influenced them, marking their height, or voting for their favorite book genre.



Images 1a and 1b: What Made Me, an interactive data display inviting patrons to share what made them think, create, and change by wrapping colored threads around pinned words representing concepts in those categories. Patrons could see which concepts inspired the most thought by the density of threads wrapped around it.

The low barrier to entry proved effective. In addition to adding to the displays en masse, patrons engaged with related prompts. In the months prior, we had posted signs throughout the library asking patrons to share suggestions for our popular reading collection, to minimal response. When we included a jar for patrons to submit book suggestions alongside our favorite fiction genre display, we received over a dozen suggestions.



Image 2: What's Your Favorite Fiction Genre, an interactive data display inviting patrons to vote for their favorite genre by placing a puffball inside large mason jars labeled with different book genres. Patrons could identify the most popular genres by seeing which jars filled up the most. At the end of the week we had a rough tie between fantasy and romance, with both jars about three-quarters full.

Data Visualization Contest

Our data visualization contest encouraged students to exercise their creativity by creating a data visualization on a topic of their choosing. We anticipated graduate students as our primary audience, as they would likely have experience in creating visualizations for posters or research articles. We were pleasantly surprised by the high levels of undergraduate student participation, who represented approximately two-thirds (14) of our 21 entries. We learned a graphic design professor had crafted a class assignment around the contest, leading to the increased uptake. We intend to explicitly build in similar co-curricular connections to this contest in 2026.

Data Management Workshops

We conducted two introductory workshops on data management, titled Data Management 101. Given the anticipated range of participants' familiarity with the topic, we offered a foundational overview accessible to individuals at varying skill levels. One session was held online in the evening to accommodate distance students and faculty, while the other was conducted in person and included a luncheon.

Attendance at the online session was lower than expected – out of 9 registrants, 3 attended. This might indicate online options attract an audience more interested in receiving the content for later review than participatory engagement. In contrast, the in-person workshop had 8 registrants but attracted 3 additional student walk-ins, an unexpected and welcome outcome. Anecdotal feedback from attendees indicated a strong interest in continued offerings on data management.

Future Programming

A planning committee consisting of representatives from each library held biweekly meetings to coordinate project goals and discuss funding strategies. Event planning was done collaboratively, with funding provided by the main campus and medical school libraries. Given the success of this initiative, we have created an interlibrary programming group to facilitate ongoing collaborative programming in the future. We have included further details on changes we plan to implement for next year's Love Data Week program in [Appendix A: Lessons Learned](#).

CRedit Statement

Term	Author Initials
Writing - Original Draft	ZY, SW
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