

# Cephalonian 2.0:

## Transforming Large-Scale Library Orientations to Support Student Success

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### Introduction

Academic libraries face the challenging task of providing engaging and informative library orientation sessions to first-year students. Short windows of opportunity to reach large groups of students and limited resources to support library outreach often hinder events designed to connect first-year students with the services of the library. As a result, librarians frequently guide students through the academic library in an obligatory tour or lead a passive, lecture-style, library orientation.

At Eckerd College, a small, private, liberal arts institution, librarians strived to host orientations that were fun, engaging, and designed to reduce the library anxiety experienced by first-year students. The orientations, ranging from LibraryPalooza (a music-filled open house) to the Amazing Race: Eckerd Library Edition, were large-scale, multi-faceted events. These events facilitated external campus partnerships and introduced all first-year students to the library and its services in a fun and exciting manner. While the benefits of hosting large-scale themed events each year were valuable, administering these orientations became extremely time-intensive to plan and manage for the library's small staff. As a result, librarians began to explore alternative orientation formats that would continue the tradition of creativity and engagement, ensure positive student feedback, and reduce the amount of time and effort invested in library orientations each year.

In 2015, the library implemented a supercharged version of the Cephalonian method to create a dynamic orientation branded as #MyEckerdLibrary. The Cephalonian method, first used at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom, is an active learning approach to library orientations that uses pre-established questions and audience participation to create a lively and seemingly spontaneous question and answer session to present information.<sup>1</sup> The Eckerd orientation expanded on the Cephalonian method by integrating polling software for increased student participation, leveraging community and campus partnerships, and highlighting an overall theme reflecting our campus culture. The result was an engaging orientation requiring minimal resources that introduced the library and resulted in better retention of orientation outcomes for students.

### Literature Review

#### *Library Anxiety and Library Orientation Programs*

Recent studies have attempted to connect student use of the library with academic success. A 2010 study by Had-

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dow and Joseph correlated library use with better grades and student retention.<sup>2</sup> A 2016 ACRL report reinforces this study, which highlights assessments at two institutions that show students who use the library have GPAs 0.20 higher than those who do not.<sup>3</sup> It is in our best interest to continue to find ways to make libraries and the research process approachable and unthreatening for our students in order to strengthen our contributions to student success.

Libraries have long struggled with finding ways to help students overcome their inhibitions to using the library. A seminal 1986 article in *College & Research Libraries* by Constance A. Mellon provided a grounded theory approach to the concept of library anxiety, defined as an elevated level of apprehension experienced by students during library research experiences.<sup>4</sup> Mellon describes the phenomenon as potentially affecting 75–85% of students.<sup>5</sup> Project Information Literacy continued to find this relationship in its 2009 survey of undergraduates, who described library research in negative terms including fear, angst, tired, dread, anxious, annoyed, stressed, disgusted, confused, and overwhelmed.<sup>6</sup>

A common approach to addressing library anxiety is through library orientations. A review of the literature on orientation programs at academic libraries for first-year students shows that a variety of orientation styles has been successful. Since academic library orientations are not always mandatory for first-year students, there is significant variance in orientation types. Library orientations have evolved from passive, lecture-based information sessions to a variety of orientation models including guided tours, self-guided iPod or video tours, treasure hunts, open house events, interactive races, and online library orientations. This wide variety of library orientations shows that libraries are continuously adapting to meet the information needs of first-year students. Research on the characteristics of millennial students has been used to structure library orientation programs to be more relaxed, informal, and self-directed, with very little lecture and lots of student engagement and activity.<sup>7</sup> These characteristics are evident in the different types of library orientation programs found in the literature over the past 15 years.

Research comparing an interactive self-guided treasure hunt with a traditional guided tour for first-year students received positive feedback from participants who said the self-guided treasure hunt was very effective.<sup>8</sup> The Lafayette College Library recently designed self-guided team-based tours called “The Research Games,” based on the popular *Hunger Games* book and movie series, where first-year students learned what the library has to offer and where to find it in an interactive team-based library orientation.<sup>9</sup> Other libraries have taken a different approach to self-guided tours, such as audio tours using iPods<sup>10</sup> or self-guided video tours.<sup>11</sup>

Alternative library orientations include open house events that focus on students’ feelings about the library instead of focusing on showing students how to use library resources.<sup>12</sup> These open house library orientations encourage new students to visit the library in an informal and fun setting. Since 2004, the University at Albany’s Library has held a LibraryPaloosa event to welcome both new and continuing students to the library.<sup>13</sup> Similar to the open house orientations, an interactive library orientation at Cleveland State Community College included three stations with interactive activities for students to complete, including a library research-themed Mad Libs activity and an introduction to the library’s Facebook page.<sup>14</sup>

Other library orientation programs include interactive or game-themed programs such as mystery tours or those modeled after popular television shows.<sup>15</sup> Since University of Arizona librarians at the 2007 ACRL Conference first presented the Amazing Race library orientation idea, a number of academic libraries have adapted first-year library orientation programs modeled after the Amazing Race.<sup>16</sup> Long Island University adapted the Amazing Library Race to address the learning outcomes of reducing library anxiety and providing general information about their collections and services.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, some college and university libraries have implemented online orientations either in lieu of traditional in-person library orientation programs or to better reach distance education students. A study in 2013

surveying distance librarians at academic libraries found that 49% of the respondents offered both face-to-face and online library orientations.<sup>18</sup> The Brooklyn College Library developed an online library orientation program to provide freshman students with an entirely web-based introduction to the library's resources and services, thereby replacing the previous in-person library orientation.<sup>19</sup> As evidenced in the literature, academic libraries use a wide variety of library orientation programs to introduce first-year students to the library's services and resources.

### *Introducing the Cephalonian Method*

The Cephalonian method provides an engaging, dynamic, and easily adaptable alternative to traditional library orientations that works well with groups of any size. The method includes the use of pre-set questions distributed among the audience to encourage participation and serve as an icebreaker for unscripted questions from participants. Well-timed, professional, and, ideally, humorous slides highlight library services and resources to create an orientation that provides the illusion of spontaneity. Pre- and post-event music can add to the fun nature of the event, which provides libraries the opportunity to present themselves to students in an informal and approachable way.

The Cephalonian method, created by librarians Nigel Morgan and Linda Davies at Cardiff University (U.K.), was inspired by a technique used by tour guides in Cephalonia, Greece.<sup>20</sup> They first used the method for medical and biological sciences students in 2002 through *induction* sessions, described as initial contact sessions that do not consist of library instruction—the equivalent of library orientations in the U.S. Their goals were to “demystify” the library for students and present information on services in a stimulating, engaging, and enjoyable way, in contrast to the perception of traditional library orientations, which are often viewed as boring and uninspiring.<sup>21</sup> While widespread use has not been documented in the literature, the method has seen some positive results in institutions within the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, such as a pilot project at the Waterford Institute of Technology<sup>22</sup>, a large-scale induction at the University of Sussex,<sup>23</sup> and orientations linked to library tours at the University of Cambridge.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Campbell University (N.C.) librarians merged the Cephalonian Method with a library tour for first-year English 100 students.<sup>25</sup>

### **History of Library Orientations at Eckerd**

The Eckerd College Library has conducted library orientations for first-year students during Autumn Term, a three-week short term in August, since the early 1980s. From the beginning, the library collaborated with campus partners to identify a time to meet with all first-year students. While the orientation programs have changed over the years, the library has had a unique and increasingly rare opportunity to provide all 500 first-year students with a library orientation during Autumn Term.

Previous orientation programs included one-hour library instruction sessions, library tours, librarian classroom visits, and more recently, interactive orientations that included open house events called LibraryPalooza and the Amazing Race: Eckerd Library Edition. From 2002–2006, the library orientation program consisted of a one-hour library instruction session where students were given a short tour of the library and librarians provided information on the library's services and resources. From 2007–2010, the library took a different approach to the previous model and organized a fun and interactive library open house called LibraryPalooza. Loosely modeled after Penn State University Libraries' open house concept,<sup>26</sup> LibraryPalooza took place over a four-hour block of time during first-year students' first week on campus. The event included music, fun prizes, and highlighted different areas throughout the library where students met librarians to learn about the library.

Although LibraryPalooza was interactive and introduced the library in a fun atmosphere, it became chaotic in later years due to the loose structure and the excessive crowds of students in the library at once, and feedback

received from students warranted a change. The librarians decided to move to a team-based race throughout the library, derived from the concept of the popular *Amazing Race* television program. The idea for this type of orientation event came from the University of Arizona Libraries *Amazing Race* library orientation events.<sup>27</sup> From 2011–2014, *The Amazing Race: Eckerd Library Edition* provided a fun and lively library orientation using interactive games to introduce the library and its services to over 500 first-year students in one afternoon.

While the *Amazing Race* provided a fun and interactive introduction to the library and student feedback of the event was overwhelmingly positive, after the fourth year it was apparent that another change was necessary. Librarians based the conclusion on a variety of reasons; including heavy staffing needs, time intensive setup and planning, a theme no longer relevant to incoming first-year students, and the dislike some students had of the competitive race format. Furthermore, it was clear that retention of library-related information was poor, as students were more engaged in completing the race than learning about the library. As a result, librarians began re-searching other library orientation options and identifying the desired goals for a new library orientation event.

## Planning and Implementation

The planning process began with a review of past orientation models, illuminating goals that seemed attainable, as well as those that might be beyond the scope of an orientation. Major objectives were to reduce library anxiety and expose first-year students to the services and resources available through their library. Librarians wanted to appear approachable, highlight access to major services, and touch upon some unexpected resources for students. Librarians determined early on that the orientation would not teach the specific steps to find a book but empower students with the confidence of knowing where to start and how to get help when needed.

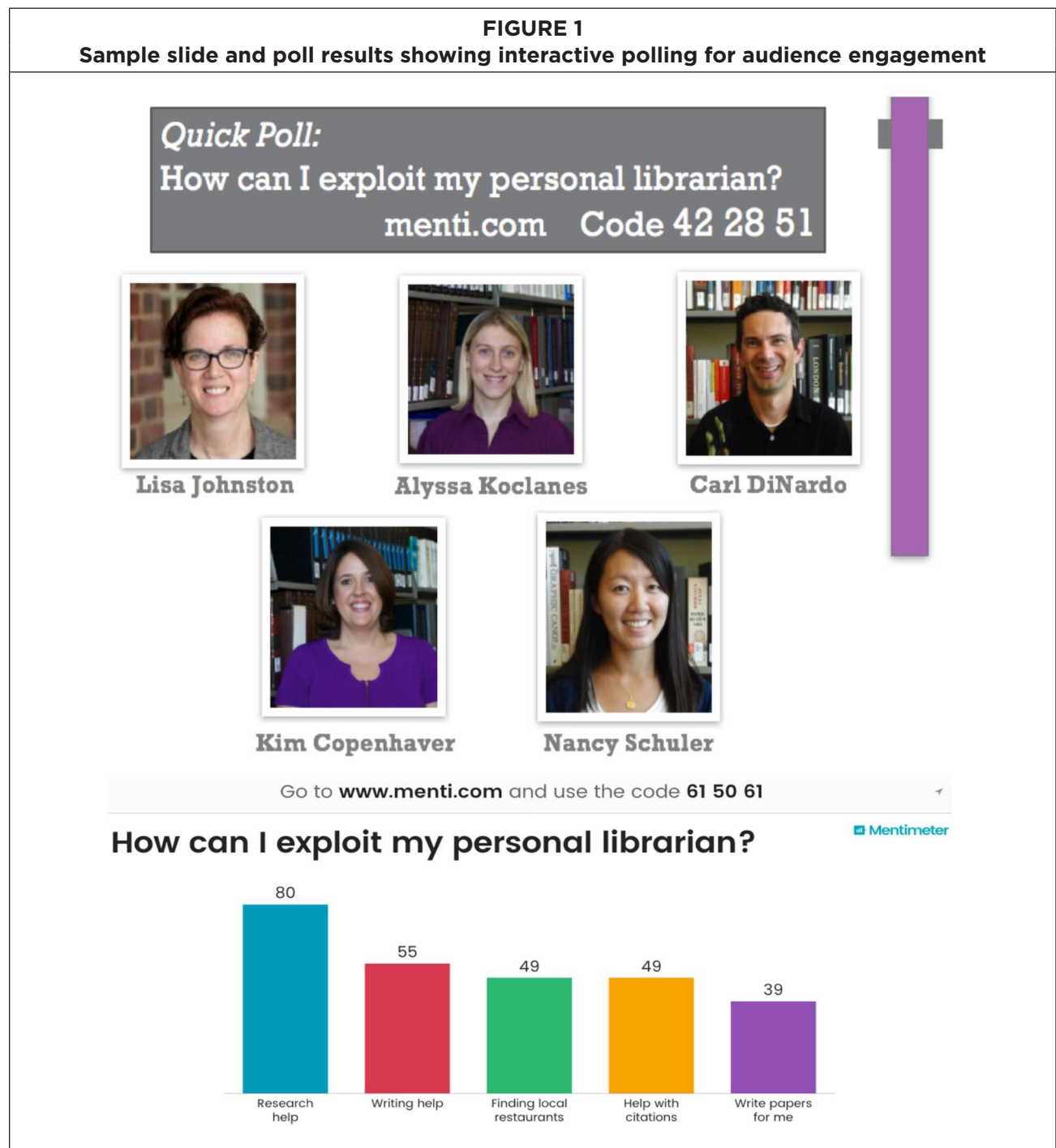
Drawing from Morgan and Davies,<sup>28</sup> librarians identified the Cephalonian method as a framework to create a lively and more meaningful introduction to the library. Librarians identified four broadly defined areas (library services, library resources, getting help, and general FAQs), and sought to embody these in question and answer form, always seeking a unique way of approaching question choice and wording. As an added benefit during the actual orientation, this focused preparation enabled librarians to address the pop-up, unscripted questions without going too far afield. Further discussion brought new ideas to the #MyEckerdLibrary version, including increased audience engagement through polling software.

In 2015, the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation took place during two separate sessions, each approximately 45 minutes in length. Due to the size of the incoming class, the orientation did not take place in the library. First-year students separate into two smaller groups as they attend sessions on campus due to the capacity restrictions of campus facilities. However, the Cephalonian method could accommodate all 500 first-year students simultaneously,

Music greeted students entering the space as ushers helped seat them in forward-facing rows, passed out candy, and kept the energy high. Ushers also handed out prepared questions, ensuring an even distribution among the first-year students. Students found a small gift bag on their seat, which included an Eckerd Library skateboard keychain and informational bookmark. As the session started, the music lowered and, with all presenters on the stage, a librarian opened the session welcoming students and introducing the presenters. The introduction included phrases such as “we didn’t want to do a boring session” and “we want to know what you want to know about your library.” We also encouraged students to use the #MyEckerdLibrary twitter hashtag to submit questions as a way to include students who were not as comfortable asking questions in a large group. To finish the introduction, a library student employee rode up to the stage on a custom Eckerd College skateboard, this would serve as the grand prize for answering survey questions at the conclusion of the event.

Incentives to encourage students to ask questions included a choice between a #MyEckerdLibrary t-shirt and an Eckerd College lanyard. When a student asked a prepared question, one of the presenters would quickly bring up the corresponding slide, resulting in the smooth transition to answering the question. Librarians designed slides to be fun and tongue-in-cheek while still offering useful information about the library and aligning with intended orientation outcomes. Some slides directed students to a poll (as shown in figure 1), where they responded using their smartphone. At the close of the session, the presenters thanked the students as the music volume increased and students exited the space.

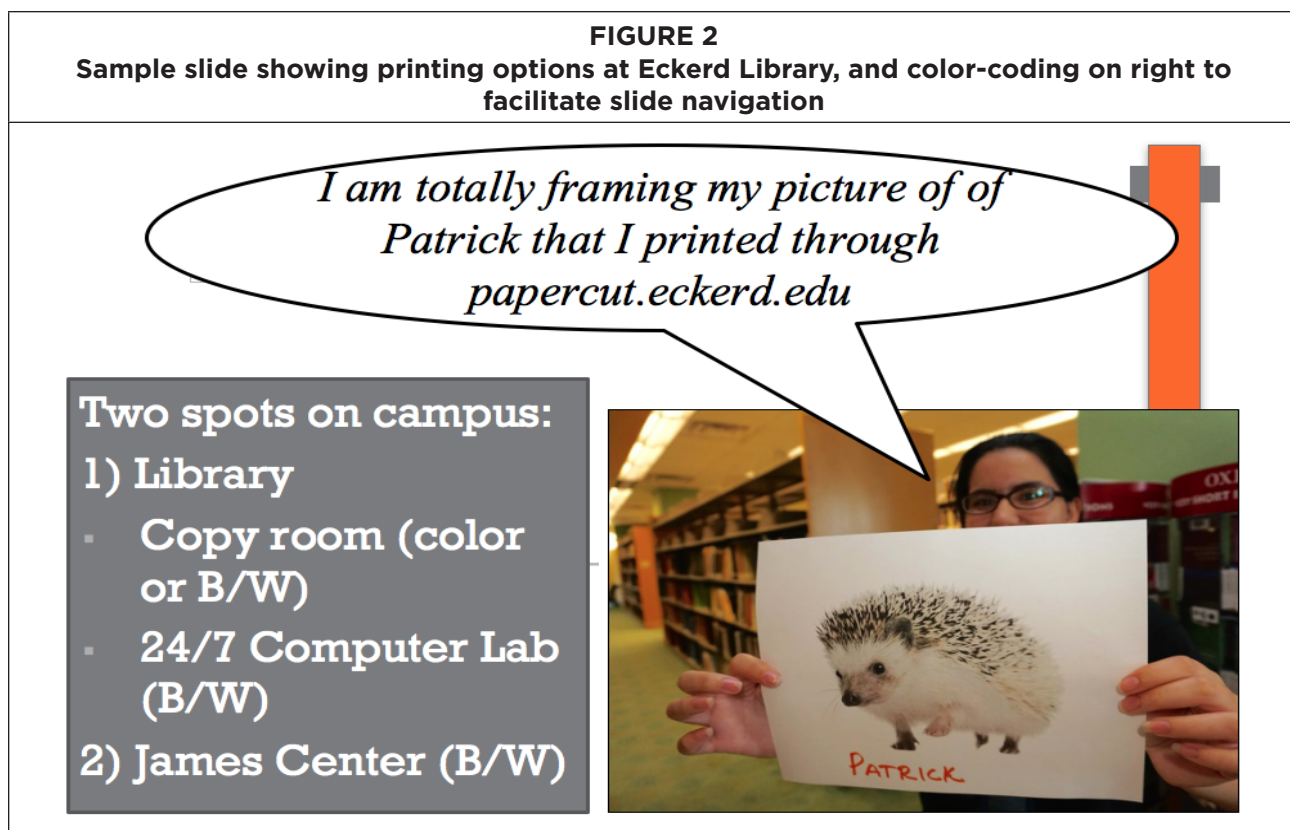
**FIGURE 1**  
**Sample slide and poll results showing interactive polling for audience engagement**



## Customization

In addition to using the Cephalonian method, the successful implementation of the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation included connecting with campus culture, building/maintaining on and off campus partnerships, and communication with faculty and administration. Planning an orientation that de-emphasized learning *how* to use the library resulted in a need to inform faculty about our approach. We have been fortunate to do so during faculty pre-term planning meetings. Some faculty assumed that students completing the library orientation would be able to perform basic research. We needed to be clear about our goals and reasoning, while underscoring the importance of integrating information literacy instruction into the first-year curriculum.

Eckerd College's slogan "Think Outside" represents pride in an academically-driven liberal arts program that maintains a unique atmosphere for learning. Tapping into campus culture informed nearly every aspect of planning. Examples of cultural observations included Eckerd's pet-friendly campus and widespread skateboarding culture. In creating slides, we opted to incorporate images, polls and memes that connected with the Eckerd lifestyle as illustrated in figure 2. Themed prizes, such as custom skateboards for a grand prize, skateboard key chains, T-shirts, lanyards, and candy reinforced connections to campus culture. This kind of planning also influenced how we would answer questions, planned or otherwise, such as poking fun at ourselves while still underscoring our usefulness as a resource to students.



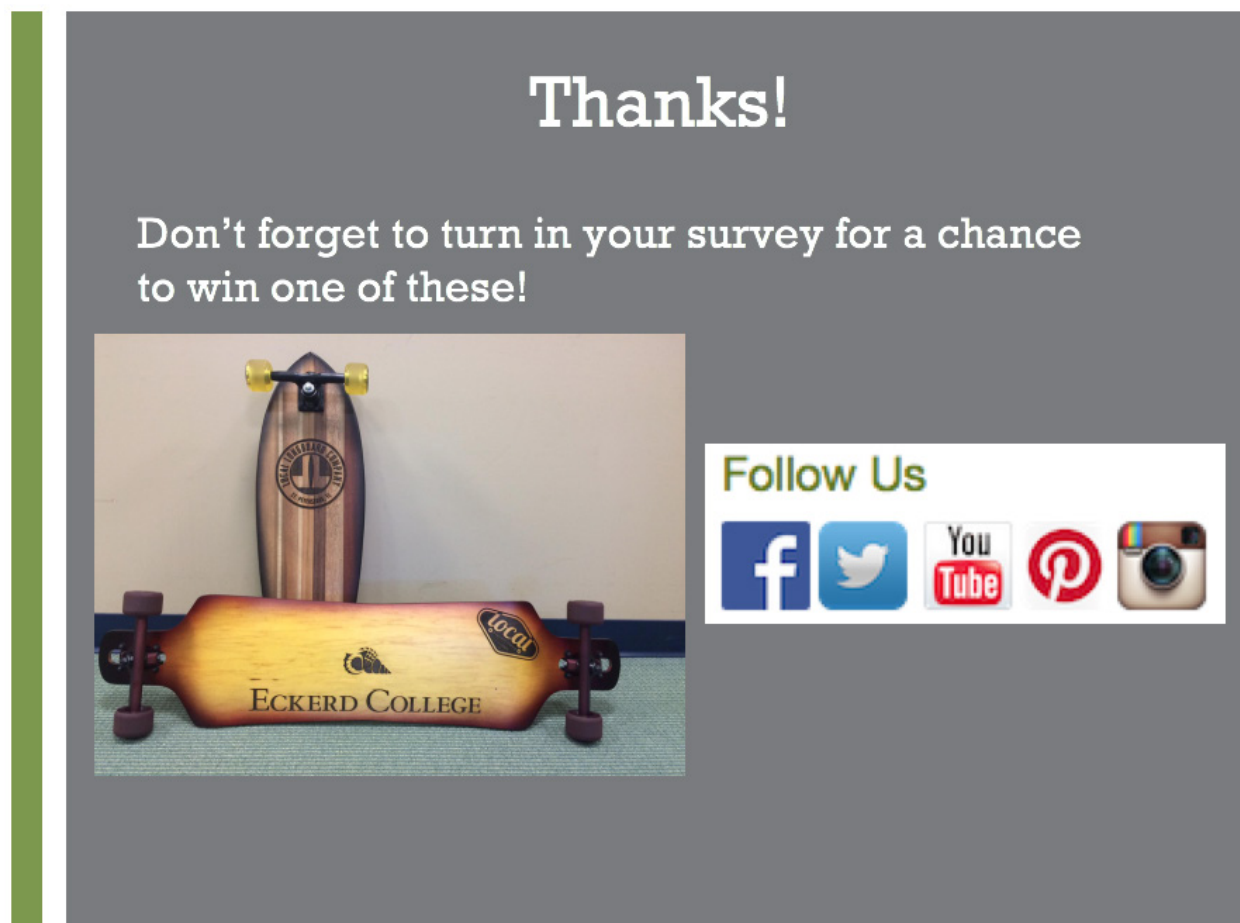
Both on and off-campus partnerships augmented the successful implementation of the orientation. While our priority has necessarily been the on-campus partnerships due to the need for funding, space, staffing assistance, and brainstorming, the successful cultivation of off-campus partnerships contributed to the overall positive reception the orientation enjoyed. The most important on-campus relationship is with Student Affairs. Working with the Dean of Students helped generate buy-in and a fundamental belief that the library's vision for

this critical introduction to the library is worth supporting. This backing includes financial support, logistical and planning aid, brainstorming ideas to enhance the event, providing access to student reflections on the event, and making student help available during the orientation.

While students take a short survey following the orientation, we have the privilege of being able to get deeper feedback through the reflective portfolios all incoming students submit at the end of Autumn Term. These portfolios include a section for the library orientation, and Student Affairs grants us access to review a cross section of these reflections. This allows us to make better sense of what the students think about the orientation and the library.

The library established an important off-campus partnership with a local company that crafts custom skateboards. Because skateboard culture is so prevalent on Eckerd's campus, this relationship is mutually beneficial. For the event, the company agreed to provide two custom boards engraved with both the college and company logos (as depicted in figure 3). Librarians used these incentives to encourage students to complete the assessment survey at the conclusion of the orientation. In addition, the company offered a discount to Eckerd students as part of the partnership. The company has seen benefits from this relationship, the students are thrilled about the boards offered, and the response rate for our assessment instrument is 83%.

**FIGURE 3**  
Final slide showing longboard incentives to fill out post-event survey



## Assessment

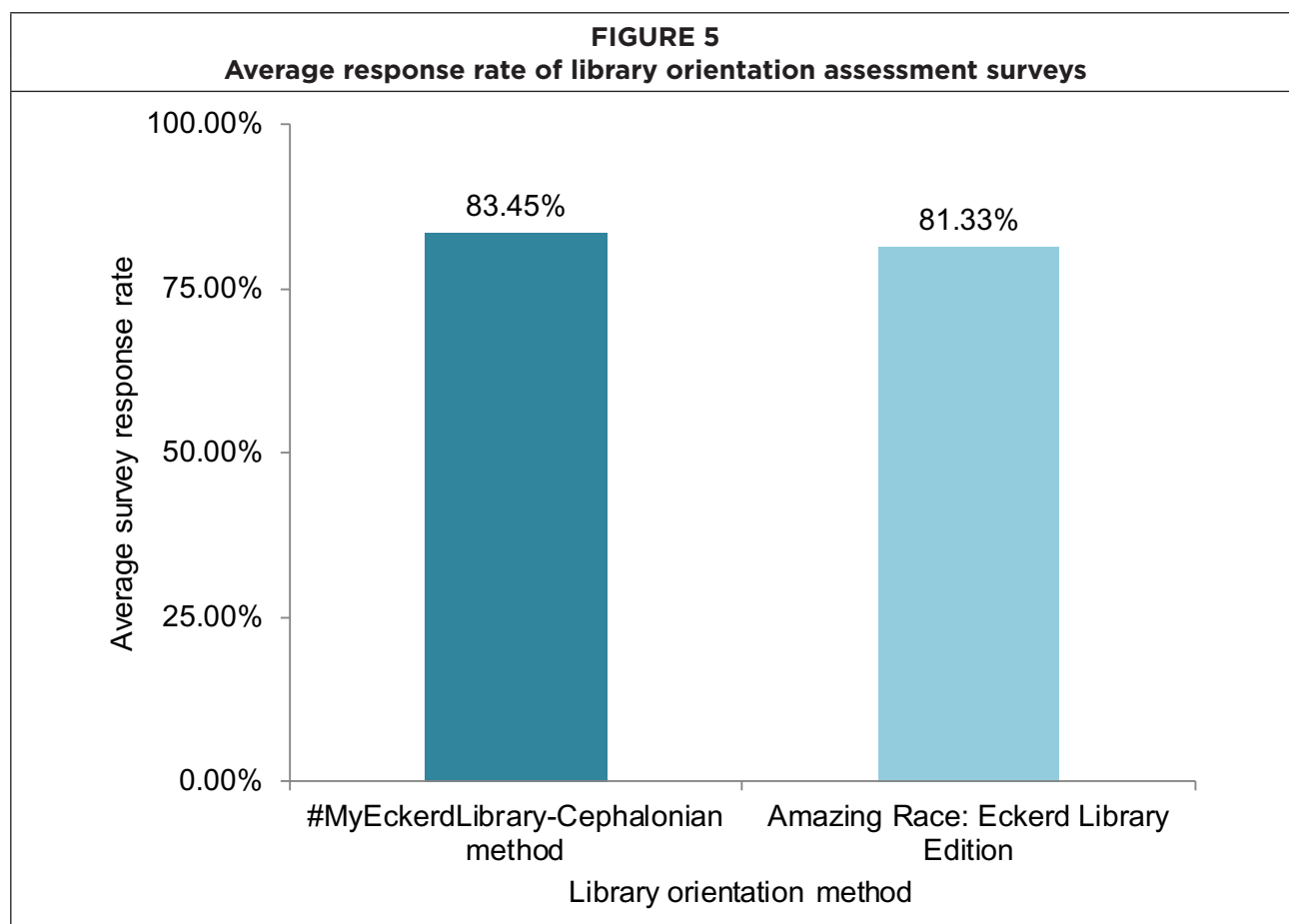
Eckerd librarians are diligent in assessing student outreach efforts and use data to document success and inform change. In line with this practice, librarians conducted a survey assessment following each iteration of the Amazing Race and #MyEckerdLibrary orientation events. In each case, students completed a short survey following the conclusion of the orientation as illustrated in figure 4. To encourage completion, librarians offered incentives ranging from Nook e-readers and Amazon Kindle Fire tablets to custom engraved skateboards. With the exception of the incentive, the survey remained the same for both events, allowing for a direct comparison of responses received and insight into student perception of library orientations.

<b>FIGURE 4</b> <b>Post-orientation survey assessment instrument</b>
<b>Enter the GRAND PRIZE Drawing to WIN a Custom Eckerd College Longboard!</b>
<b>NAME:</b> _____
<b>EMAIL:</b> _____
<p>1. The #MyEckerdLibrary event helped me learn about the services and facilities of the Eckerd College Library (circle your answer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree</p>
<p>2. Was this a fun way to learn about library services?  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>3. Following this event, are you comfortable contacting your Personal Librarian or another librarian for help?  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>4. How would you improve this program for next year's new students?</p>

For the purpose of assessment, librarians averaged the survey results for the 2013 and 2014 Amazing Race: Eckerd Library Edition orientations to facilitate a comparison with the averages recorded from the #MyEckerdLibrary orientations held in 2015 and 2016. The averages allow for a comparison between the two orientation styles, illuminating similarities and differences in student perception. As noted in figure 5, the survey response rate for both events was strong at just over 80%. The #MyEckerdLibrary orientations saw a slight increase of 2.12% in survey responses. This is most likely because the events concluded at one time and librarians directed students to complete and return their surveys prior to departure. During the Amazing Race, teams of students finished at varying times and speeds and may not have all received the same timely directive to complete and return their survey.



As illustrated in figure 6, the most significant improvements are seen in responses to Question 1, “The orientation event helped me learn about the services and facilities of the Eckerd College Library.” Following the Amazing Race orientation, 39.26% of students strongly agreed that the event helped them to learn about the library. Following the conclusion of the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation, 70.41% of students strongly agreed that the event helped them to learn about the library. This was a marked increase of 31.15%. The increase may be due to the fact that the #MyEckerdLibrary was more engaging and interactive, which led to more students actively listening to questions asked by fellow students, and subsequent responses. The anticipation in hearing the next question may have added to the level of interest students appeared to show for the content. In contrast, the Amazing Race consisted of specific tasks required to finish the race. Students often focused on completing the task, rather than paying attention to library related content embedded into each activity.

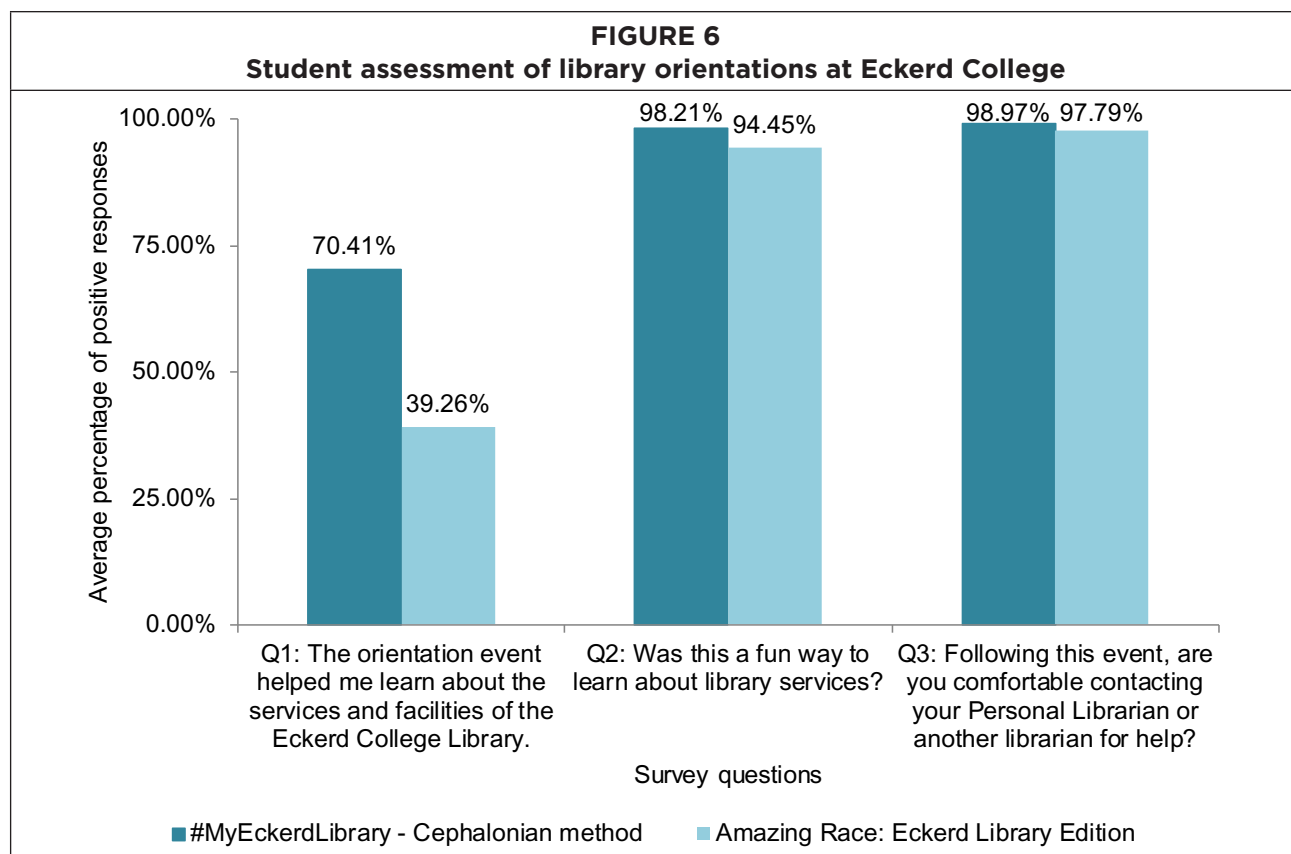


Question 2 was designed to measure the effectiveness of the orientation to introduce the library, its services and staff in a fun, non-intimidating way. Following the conclusion of the Amazing Race, 94.45% of students surveyed agreed with the statement. Similarly, 98.21% of students surveyed at the conclusion of the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation, agreed that the event was fun and non-intimidating, documenting a slight increase of 3.76% as depicted in figure 6. For the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation, the entertaining and engaging presentation style contributed to the fun atmosphere, while for the Amazing Race, the gamified approach provided the element of fun.

Question 3 attempted to assess the effectiveness of the orientation to reduce barriers between librarians and individual students and increase student awareness of the Personal Librarian program offered by the library.

Following the Amazing Race, 97.79% of students surveyed agreed they would be comfortable contacting their Personal Librarian for assistance. A small increase of 1.18% of students agreed with the statement following the conclusion of the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation, as shown in figure 6.

A summative comparison of assessment data illuminates important consistencies between both orientation events. Student responses to Questions 2 and 3 remained relatively stable. More importantly, however, was the 31.15% increase in students that strongly agreed with Question 1, indicating that the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation was successful in helping students to learn about the services and facilities of the library.



Open-ended responses to the final survey question as well as responses from portfolio reflections provide in-depth insight into the success of the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation. Many student suggestions were constructive in nature, such as the request to incorporate library tours, to include personal information about librarians so that students could get to know their personal librarians, and follow up questions regarding library services, such as the availability of library tutorials and print services. Overall, responses demonstrated a positive experience that resonated with students, and relieved some of the anxieties they had about using the library:

“I feel comfortable with asking for help from a librarian especially after meeting them and hearing them speak. I was surprised at how interesting and funny the librarians are!”

“This to me was very helpful because I know in the future that when I am struggling with finding credible research or even citations I can go to the library for help. I feel comfortable asking a librarian for help because the staff is so welcoming, helpful, and friendly.”

In addition, the event may have helped us to attract certain students that would have otherwise not used the library by introducing our services and resources:

“I really liked getting to know more about the library and the services they provide. I wouldn’t have known about the group study rooms, interlibrary loans, or that the library had DVDs in it without this orientation. I liked that it was fun and interactive.”

“I have never been interested in studying in the library. But now I know how much this library has to offer, I might end up living there.”

Furthermore, the relaxed nature of the #MyEckerdLibrary event may have allowed students to feel more comfortable in asking their own questions about the library:

“I liked the presentation because people asked questions that I had been wondering about.”

The increased levels of student satisfaction documented by assessment surveys strengthened support for the #MyEckerdLibrary orientation. #MyEckerdLibrary retained the traditions of creativity and engagement, increased student satisfaction levels in all categories and reduced the amount of time and effort invested in planning orientations each year.

## **Cephalonian—Why it works for us**

The enhanced orientation event founded on the Cephalonian Method has provided the Eckerd College Library with a successful, versatile, and engaging approach to presenting library services to first-year undergraduate students. In Eckerd’s history of trying many orientation methods, Cephalonian has been a welcome change that has allowed the librarians to make a positive first impression with incoming students. The dynamic and unpredictable nature of the presentation makes every session unique, making the event not only entertaining for students, but the librarians as well. The method makes sense for a library at a small institution because of its low administrative burden, as well as its unlimited potential for adaptation. Furthermore, it allows librarians to address each aspect of library/information anxiety in order to make an impact on student success early on.

Prior to Cephalonian, Eckerd used the Amazing Race themed event, which included the use of multiple interactive games to introduce students to the library building and its services. After 4 years, librarians recognized that the effort involved in event preparation was too much to bear for a staff of our size. The evolution to a simplified presentation style like Cephalonian has completely flipped the library’s approach to orientations, and now allows librarians to focus more time on preparing course-specific information literacy sessions to further engage and assist incoming students.

The Cephalonian method also has unlimited potential for customization. It is adaptable to different sized audiences, from a small class to a large-scale orientation with hundreds of students. Our own approach included two separate sessions of up to 250 students each. This was limited only due to the facilities available to host that number of students. While created for undergraduates, Cephalonian also works for students as young as 11 years old<sup>29</sup> and up to PhD candidates<sup>30</sup> for research orientations. In addition to orientations, Cephalonian is used in a variety of settings. Several institutions have incorporated the method into traditional library tours. Morgan and Davies, the originators of the method, report its use within information literacy classes, lectures or presentations, and even for staff training.<sup>31</sup> As we have shown, additional enhancements such as campus culture-driven

themes, interactive polls, and funny memes can add to the overall entertainment value of the presentation in unlimited ways.

The Cephalonian approach allows librarians to address library anxiety in a brief and informative session. The dynamic and engaging nature of the Cephalonian presentation style makes it a powerful strategy because students are engaged in the presentation, and therefore attentive to content shared with them. This creates an ideal environment for addressing library anxiety through an almost theatrical presentation of library information.

The Cephalonian approach to library orientations is just one-step in the path to getting students to become regular library users. If librarians can assist students in overcoming their feelings of fear, dread, and confusion to get those students in the door, they can then supplement their efforts through information literacy instruction, reference support, and friendly interactions as students become regular library users. Studies show becoming part of students' academic support network results in higher GPAs, increased student retention, and contributes to overall student success. The Cephalonian approach has been a powerful tool for librarians to reach incoming students. It helps us make that all-important positive first impression of the library that hopefully changes any pre-existing assumptions about librarians and puts us in a position to be potential partners in student learning and success.

## Future Directions

While feedback from the 2015 #MyEckerdLibrary orientation was overwhelmingly positive, there were a few constructive suggestions for change. We elected to alter very little of the content, and sought instead to augment the orientation based on these suggestions. To accommodate feedback from students wishing to see the library, we added an after-party that included optional library tours following the orientation. As Student Affairs saw value in what the library had done in 2015, they supported our ideas and agreed to host a dinner, including live music and other activities, at the conclusion of the orientation in 2016. Librarians used this time to meet with students more personally, addressing another criticism that emerged in feedback.

While it was fun for all, timing library tours during dinner and live music meant that relatively few students took advantage of the opportunity. We are considering how to revise the after-party to make a library tour more attractive to students. Offering dinner after the orientation required seating the students at round tables for the orientation. An observed outcome of this change was more talking and noise during the presentation. However, the entries in the students' portfolios were more substantive, and we attribute this to students writing during the event as they had a surface to do so. In the future, we may try to leverage this layout to facilitate student collaboration.

The #MyEckerdLibrary orientation met the desired goals of reducing library anxiety and informing first year students about the resources available to them. A focus on these goals in the context of a larger information literacy program enabled freedom from trying to accomplish too much, and opened the door for a flexible approach that scales easily. Overall, survey responses and portfolio reflections show students have a fun time, are comfortable with the library and librarians, and learn about the services offered. The #MyEckerdLibrary orientation accomplished these outcomes with a reduced investment in staff, time, and resources.

## Notes

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