

Speed Training: Library Instruction in 30 Minutes or Less

Ms. Kari Kozak, University of Iowa

I'm the Head of the Lichtenberger Engineering Library at The University of Iowa working with all of the departments and research centers within the College of Engineering. I hold bachelor's degrees in Meteorology and Environmental Studies from Iowa State and a master's degree in Library Science from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill in library science. Before coming to the University of Iowa in November of 2008, I worked at Texas A & M University as a Science & Engineering Librarian.

Darlene Kaskie, The University of Iowa Lichtenberger Engineering Library

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Abstract

A question plaguing many librarians today is how to get information out about resources and services when everyone is so busy. One answer may be to offer express classes. In the spring and fall semesters of 2013, the Library offered a series of 15-30 minute drop-in classes as part of a series called Library Xpress Classes. This series targeted one topic each week and repeated the same class twice each Thursday to reach a broader range of people. Fifty classes were offered over the two semesters. These sessions were open to faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate students. Topics covered included basics on popular databases (Compendex, SciFinder, PubMed, etc.), citation management software (Endnote and RefWorks), alerts and notifications, and popular types of resources (patents and standards). The classes were not set up to cover everything completely but just to give an overview and brief introduction to products and services that otherwise might not be seen.

The sessions were taught by librarians with different areas of expertise from the range of libraries on campus. Some classes were more successful than others; the citation management software sessions were the most popular. In the spring 2013 semester, the classes averaged a 4.47 in overall usefulness rating on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being most useful. More students attended the 2:30 pm afternoon sessions and most of the attendees were graduate students.

The classes often had repeat students. In one class on RefWorks, a graduate student noted he had never heard of Compendex until it was mentioned in this class. He then went on to sign up for 4 more of the sessions offered that semester as soon as he realized how helpful they were.

The Xpress Class series has proven to be an overall success. As time goes on the Library will continue to make adjustments to the programs so that it will continue to improve its usefulness to students, faculty, and staff in the College of Engineering.

Introduction

With so much interdisciplinary education and research being conducted within engineering, the faculty, staff, and students often need to hear about resources and services that are not usually seen in the engineering library. These library users often have time-restraints that do not allow them to attend the traditional hour long sessions on various resources and services they may have never even heard of before or have not used in sometime. The Lichtenberger Engineering Library decided to help with this problem by providing a series of drop-in sessions which were fifteen to thirty minutes in length. This series of classes was named Library Xpress Classes. The classes were open to all faculty, staff, and students on the campus and were focused towards those doing research and study through the College of Engineering.

The Library Xpress Classes targeted one topic each week and repeated the same class at two different times each Thursday to reach a broader range of people. In addition to classes being taught by the engineering library staff offering updates for primary resources in the engineering fields, sessions were also taught by library staff from other campus libraries to offer those working in interdisciplinary fields an opportunity to learn about resources that might not be familiar. Topics covered include basics on popular databases (Compendex, SciFinder, PubMed, etc.), citation management software (Endnote and RefWorks), alerts and notifications, and popular types of resources (patents and standards). The classes were not set up to cover everything completely but just to give an overview and brief introduction to products and services that otherwise might not be seen.

Literature Review

Academic librarians, recognizing the importance yet the limitations for connecting with students due to time-restraints as well as their continued reliance upon mobile technology, offer abbreviated library instruction as an alternative, or a supplement, to more formal, comprehensive teaching methods. The “traditional model” of instruction might be a one-hour lecture.³ However, the short instruction, variously named, is derived for the purpose of briefly interfacing with students for the opportunity of active and integrated education and research assistance.

Giannini wrote a report on the “‘drop-in’ sessions” which were utilized at Monash University in Australia as an alternative to the more traditional and formal library instructive methodology.

The “drop-in” classes were brief, hands-on, and targeted to introducing the basic resources of a specific subject.² Jacklin & Bordonaro, at Brock University in Canada, implements the “drop-in clinics” to supplement the formal classroom instruction. A professor introduces the librarian in a faculty classroom. Then, the librarian provides an overview of the clinics scheduled throughout the term to coincide with class assignments. During the non-mandatory drop-in clinics, students are “engaged in social learning” as the librarian functions as a “facilitator” for the student’s research.⁴

Texas A&M, librarians have developed the “drive-by”, a scheduled in-class public service announcement (PSA)-like session to give the students a sneak peak at resources and show them a friendly face from the library.¹ Similar to Jacklin & Bordonaro, the librarians form working relationships with faculty. By requesting minimal time and assistance from professors, often just asking for the class syllabi so that they can tailor the “drive-by” to specific and relevant resources associated with the course, the librarians’ initiatives and flexibility contribute to the success of the program.^{1 4}

Library instruction literature also discusses marketing and surveying as important to the success of programming. Manuel gathered and analyzed a decade worth of data from the drop-in workshops offered at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Previously, workshops had been falling out of favor as an instructional methodology due to poor attendance. Timing and marketing were identified as two key factors influencing attendance. Finding the optimal day and time during the semester which did not conflict with class schedules improved attendance. Effective promotion also achieved better attendance results. “Overall, the key to publicity is getting word out, reaching people where they are, rather than expecting them to come in to the library to pick up copies of flyers from service desks.”⁵ Creating “mailing lists” from the names of previous attendees, reporting the outcome of previous workshops to alert potential attendees of future workshops, and offering incentives such as extra course credit were all used at NMSU to boost attendance.⁵

Following any kind of instruction, surveying students, faculty, and staff help with evidentiary reporting and can guide future programming. To this end, Hollister & Coe surveyed instruction

librarians in order to report trends in instructional service. According to the survey results, traditional methods for instruction are relevant but no single instruction method is most effective. “The use of a variety of instructional methods, reaching ever-widening audiences, and addressing ever-changing needs, is preferred.”³

Designing the sessions

When beginning to plan for these sessions to reach this ever-widening audience, the original plan was to have one topic taught each week for 15 minutes. Planning required that several key elements had to be taken into consideration: classes offered, best time of the day, and instructors’ availability. All of these elements had to come together for these sessions to work.

The discussions of which classes to offer began with looking at a survey that was completed the year before which asked the College of Engineering students, faculty, and staff which classes would they like to be offered by the Library. This survey resulted in a list which included: Endnote, RefWorks, Searching for Reviewed Articles, SciFinder, Web of Science, Searching the Library, Library Overview, Calculating H-index, Modern Non-Paper Resources, Patent Searching, and Compendex. With this list in hand, the staff began to think about topics that were the most requested by instructors when providing library instruction in the classroom which resulted in adding standard searching and using PubMed to the list. The next consideration was which activities were going on in the College of Engineering. An upcoming career fair had the staff thinking the students might want a session with the Business Librarian to learn how to use various database to search for information on the company they were going to interact with at the fair. The last class added was one related to a genome and protein database. Since one of the departments in the College of Engineering is Biomedical Engineering, there has been quite a bit of research being done on genomes and proteins so it was thought they might be interested in this class. After all this debate, the library staff arrived at a listing of which classes would be offered for the first semester, Spring 2013. They were Library Overview, RefWorks, Standards, Web of Science, Finding Company Information, PubMed, SciFinder, Compendex, Genome Databases, and Patents.

Once there was a listing of which classes would be offered, it was time to think about optimal time for these classes. Looking at the gate count for the library, Tuesdays and Thursdays seemed

to be the busiest which would make for greater chance of student drop-ins if they were already in the library. Then, looking at the College of Engineering Event Calendar, there were not many events happening on Thursday so it was decided to have the sessions on Thursdays. To give more flexibility for the students, faculty, and staff attending the sessions, it was decided to offer each class twice once in the morning (10:00 am) and once in the afternoon (2:30 pm). For the Fall semester, the classes were offered at 2:30 pm and 5:00 pm.

Now, it was time to talk to various librarians throughout the Library system to see who would be willing to help teach these diverse express classes. The librarians asked to teach these classes were from various campus libraries. Several of the librarians felt that 15 minutes was not enough time to teach the topics they would be covering. They were then offered the option of teaching the classes as 30 minute classes, but it was decided no classes would be over 30 minutes because that would defeat the purpose of express classes and fall back into the “traditional” instruction model. With this option, the library staff was able to find instructors for each of the sessions. (See Figures 1 & 2).

Spring 2013

January 31st: [Library Overview](#)
 February 7th: [Refworks](#) (30 Minutes)
 February 14th: [Standards](#)
 February 21st: [Refworks](#) & WriteNCite (30 Min)
 February 28th: [Web of Science](#) (30 Minutes)
 March 7th: [Finding Company Information](#)
 March 14th: [PubMed](#)
 March 28th: [Scifinder](#) (30 Minutes)
 April 4th: [Compendex](#)
 April 11th: [Genome Database](#)
 April 18th: [Patents](#)

Figure 1: Spring 2013 Schedule

Fall 2013

September 5th - Endnote Basic
 September 12th – RefWorks & WriteNCite
 September 26th - Protein Database: 3-D Protein structures
 October 3rd - Scifinder: One Stop Shop for Chemistry Information
 October 10th - Standards: Guides and Regulations for Building and Evaluating Resources
 October 17th - Inside PubMed
 October 24th - Learn Patent Searching
 October 31st - Compendex: Everything Engineering
 November 7th - Keeping up with Your Research: Alerts and Notifications
 November 14th - Web of Science: Multidisciplinary citation database.

Figure 2: Fall 2013 Schedule

Marketing

Once the classes and the schedule were decided, it was time to start marketing the Library Xpress Class series. The marketing strategy for the series was focused on getting the word out any which way possible throughout the whole semester. The library staff wanted to be very inclusive opening the sessions up to faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students throughout the whole university with an emphasis on the College of Engineering.

They began by creating a series of flyers and slides to announce the class series and schedule. These flyers and slides were all created with a uniform look and coloring for continuity and branding. The flyer was posted throughout the College of Engineering building as well as throughout the library. The slides created were for the plasma televisions that are spaced throughout the College of Engineering buildings and the library as well as for the digital picture frames stationed at the circulation desk of the library. Separate slides were produced for each class session which were displayed the week before the class was given as well as a slide that ran the whole semester listing the whole schedule.

Next, all the sessions were added to the College of Engineering events calendar that was featured on their homepage as well as the Library events calendar. For the second semester the classes were offered, the events calendar on the library page allowed the faculty, staff, and students to register for the classes ahead of time. The College of Engineering also added an announcement about the classes through their weekly electronic newsletter at the beginning of each semester. The individual classes were then listed as part of the weekly events in each subsequent newsletter.

The library staff followed up the marketing with reminder emails of the classes to all faculty, staff, and student in the College of Engineering. For the first semester, emails were sent out each Wednesday before the sessions on Thursday. For the second semester, there was concern about filling everyone's inbox so the emails only were sent three times over the semester as a reminder of the class series. The second semester was also the semester where the patrons had the ability to register through the library calendar so the staff would send a reminder email to those who had registered.

All of these marketing activities were done throughout the semester in an effort to be as inclusive of all faculty, staff, and students as possible.

Assessment/Results

The results from the Library Xpress Classes series were a lesson in marketing strategies as well as looking closely at other events happening in the College of Engineering. With each session, the participants were given a short survey to fill out which the library staff used for assessment.

Figure 3 is a sample of the survey.

Library Xpress Class Survey
Standards (Fed 14th)

Which class time did you attend: 10 am or 2:30 pm

Please describe yourself: (Circle One)

Freshman	Graduate Student
Sophomore	Staff
Junior	Faculty
Senior	Other

What department are you associated with? (Circle One)

Biomedical Eng	Chem & Biochem Eng	Civil & Enviro Eng	Comp & Elec Eng	Mech & Ind Eng	Other
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Was today's class useful? (Circle One)

1	2	3	4	5
Least Useful				Most Useful

Which topics presented today were most useful?

What topics were the least useful?

What questions remain in your mind following this session? (Add your name & email if you want us to follow up)

Are there other topics for Library Xpress Classes you would like to see? What would you like to learn more about?

Additional Comments?




Figure 3: Library Xpress Class Survey

The series began in the spring of 2013 with classes offered at 10:00 am and 2:30pm. In Table 1 below, there is a breakdown of participants who attended the spring class series. This table demonstrates how 68% of the participants attended afternoon classes versus the morning classes. It also shows are many of the attendees were graduate students or staff that associated with various departments on campus. Those who listed their department as other were often from one of the five research centers that are associated with the College of Engineering. Civil and Environmental Engineering or Mechanical and Industrial Engineering departments were the second and third most represented groups at the sessions. The library staff, then, broke down which classes were the most attended. (See Figure 4) The largest classes by far were the session on using RefWorks followed by finding company information, standards, patents, and PubMed. This information was then used to rework the schedule for classes in the Fall 2013 semester.

Results for Spring 2013	
Average Overall Useful Rating	4.47
Total Overall Participants	37
Total Participants in 10am Classes	12
Total Participants in 2:30pm Classes	25
Participant Totals:	
Freshman	7
Sophomore	1
Junior	2
Senior	0
Grad Student	38
Faculty	7
Staff	15
Other	6
Department Totals:	
Biomedical	5
Chem & Biochem	9
Civil & Enviro	14
Comp & Elec	4
Mech & Ind	13
Other	19

Table 1: Results from Spring 2013

Spring 2013 Semester

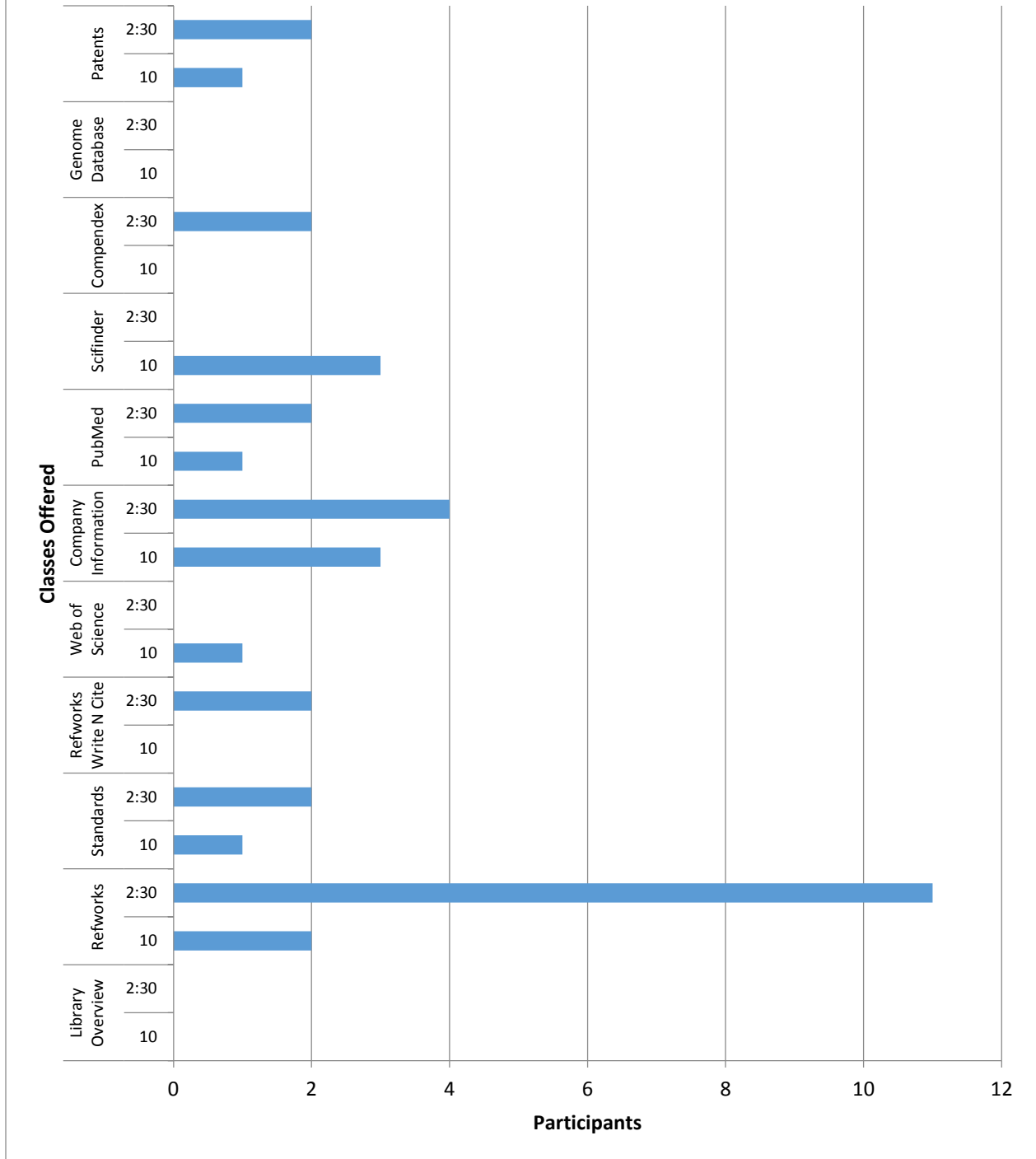


Figure 4: Participants from Spring 2013

The series was changed to 2:30 pm and 5:00 pm in the hope the later hours in the day would increase attendance. The library staff also added a session related to setting up notifications and alerts as well as changing the class on genome databases to protein databases. Results from the Fall 2013 semester can be seen in Table 2. The primary difference between the two semesters was the dramatic drop in attendance in the fall semester as well as only one person attending the 5:00 pm sessions for the entire semester. Graduate students and staff from other departments (mostly the research centers) as well as the Civil and Environmental Engineering or Mechanical and Industrial Engineering departments were the most represented groups. The more detail break down of who attended each class can be seen in Figure 5. The most popular classes were yet again RefWorks, standards, and PubMed.

Results for Fall 2013	
Average Overall Useful Rating	4.25
Total Overall Participants	20
Total Participants in 2:30pm Classes	19
Total Participants in 5pm Classes	1
Participant Totals:	
Freshman	2
Sophomore	0
Junior	0
Senior	0
Grad Student	7
Faculty	2
Staff	6
Other	3
Department Totals:	
Biomedical	2
Chem & Biochem	0
Civil & Enviro	4
Comp & Elec	1
Mech & Ind	4
Other	9

Table 2: Results from Fall 2013

Fall 2013 Semester

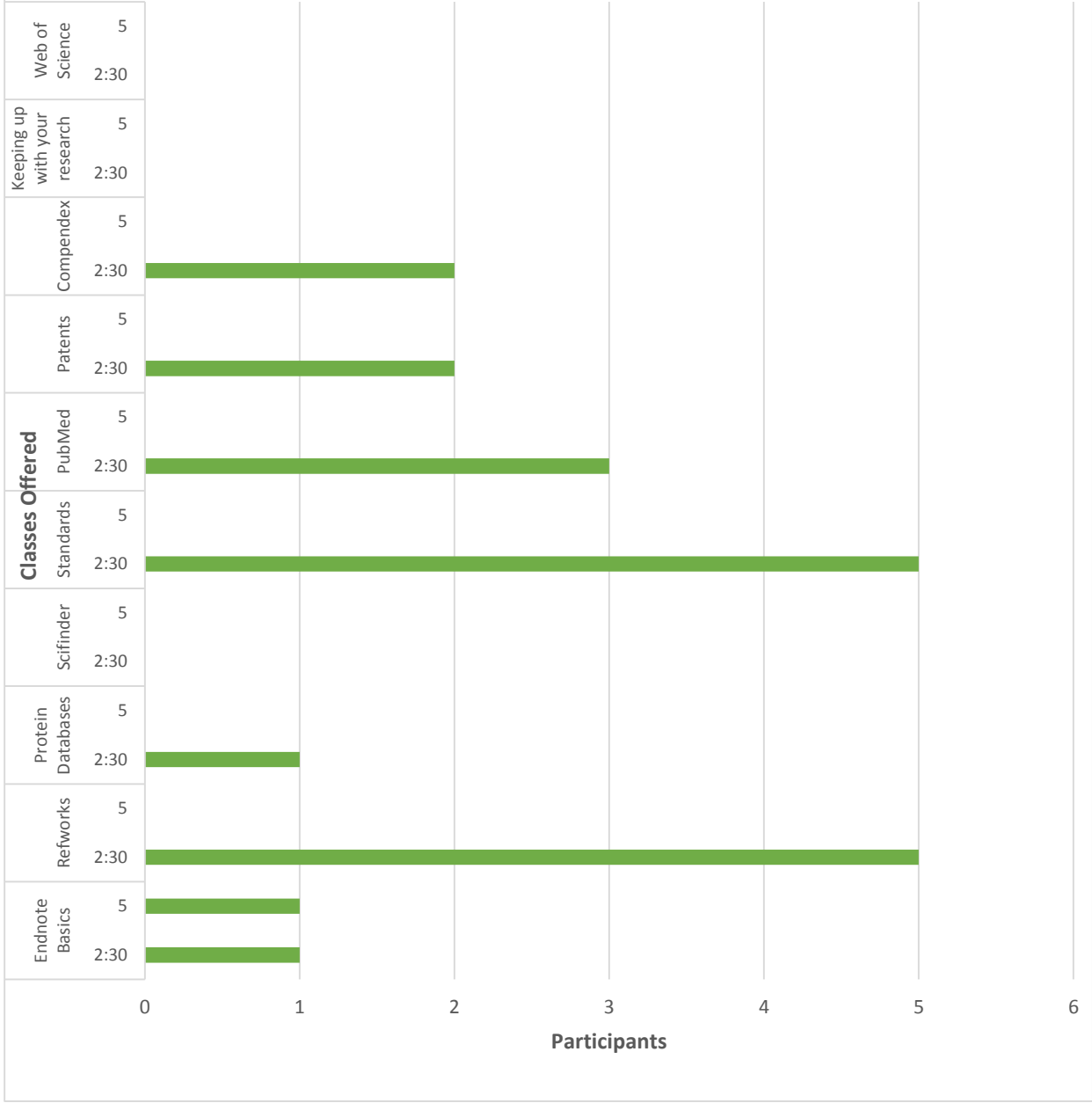


Figure 5: Participants from Fall 2013

Several factors probably played into the decrease enrollment for the fall semester. The first big change for the second semester was the lack of weekly reminder emails sent to the College of Engineering faculty, staff, and students. Reminders were only sent out three times throughout the entire semester instead of each week. The first reminder was sent the first week, right before the Standards session. The second reminder was sent before the Compendex session. Looking at attendance records, these were the classes with the highest attended sessions. The library did offer patrons the option to register for the classes which would send a reminder email the day before the class; however, only 5 people took advantage of this service throughout the semester and only 2 of the patrons that had reminders sent to them actually attended the sessions.

Another factor was Thursday afternoons were a busy time for those in the College of Engineering. Most departments had weekly seminars in the late afternoon on Thursday during the fall semester, which unfortunately did not get added to the College of Engineering events calendar until the second week of classes and the Library Xpress Classes were already organized. There were times the College of Engineering calendar would have more than 6 different activities taking place in the college on Thursday afternoons.

Even with low attendance in the fall semester, the surveys showed favorable opinions of the classes offered and several of the students attended more than one of the sessions in the series. The average rating of the classes on a 5 point scale (with 5 being most useful) was 4.47 for the spring semester and 4.25 for the fall semester. The average rating for the two semesters was 4.48. The comments were often make statements saying “very helpful” or “very useful.” Using all the answers given on the survey for “which topics presented today were most useful?”, the engineering library staff created a Wordle (Figure 6) to highlight which topics the participants found more useful. RefWorks was by far the most popular with searches, access, and standards also being high in the listing.

The last two semesters have given the library staff a great deal of information for what did and did not work for offering Library Xpress Classes. This information will be used to improve the classes for future participants.

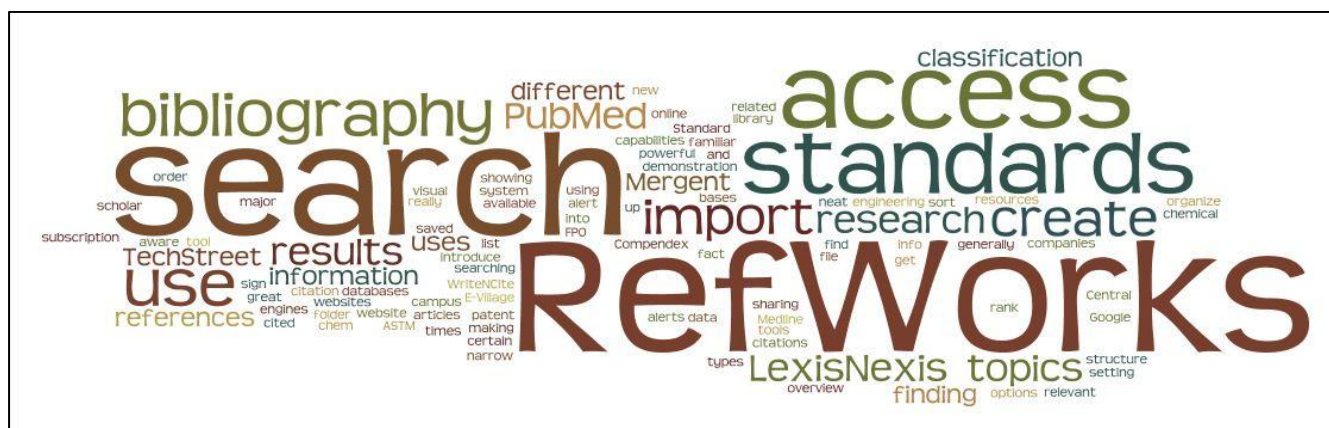


Figure 6: Wordle of Most Useful Topics

Conclusion

Library Xpress classes have been overall a success for the Library. It was an excellent opportunity for collaboration of library staff campus-wide to teach the College of Engineering faculty, staff, and student about various resources and services the library users may not know about.

To improve the series, the library staff will send weekly email reminders the day before each class and will no longer use the library events calendar registration forms. The series also will change to Wednesdays with the anticipation that fewer events will conflict with College of Engineering events but keep the times at 2:30pm and 5pm. There is enough interest to continue the series and to tweak the type and times of sessions to provide the best possible service to the College of Engineering faculty, staff, and students.

References

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