Undergraduate library research awards in Canada

~~Rewarding research or prizing promotion?~~

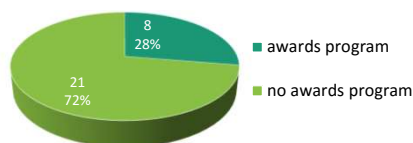Susie Breier, Concordia University Library

Context

The practice of offering a monetary prize to reward outstanding use of library resources in a project—along with an attendant reflective essay about the research trajectory—has become widespread in North America, with more than 50 university libraries offering such an award when last surveyed in 2015. Yet a focused study of the Canadian scene has been lacking.

Objectives

This preliminary study aims to offer a portrait of undergraduate library research awards programs in Canada. Case studies and best practice articles have already outlined multiple benefits of this practice. Yet I hope to provide results relevant to those who may be actively considering an awards program while weighing possible underlying complexities.

Method

I searched and scanned the websites of the 29 CARL member libraries to determine how many of these offered awards programs. I then analyzed the awards documentation of the eight relevant libraries to identify shared characteristics and interconnecting practices. I contacted librarians at four institutions to complete data not available on the websites.
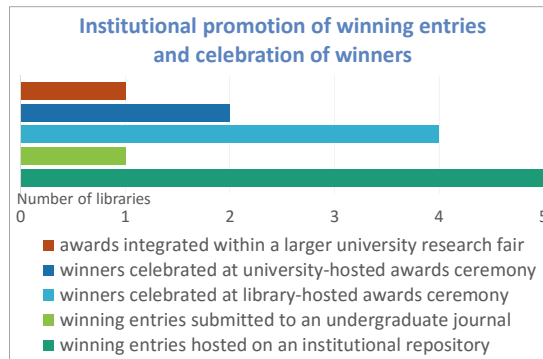
- 8 28% awards program
- 21 72% no awards program

CARL libraries offering awards: 8 of 29

Findings

While less than a third of CARL libraries currently advertise awards programs (8 of 29), half of these were launched within the last five years.

Shared characteristics and interconnecting practices were categorized under the following themes:
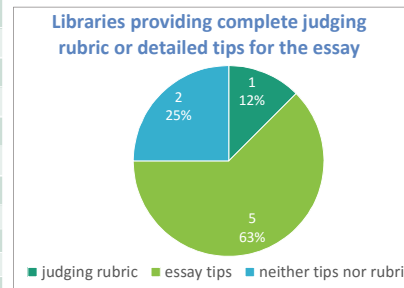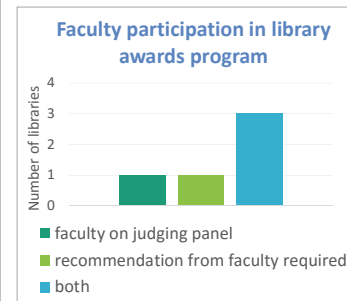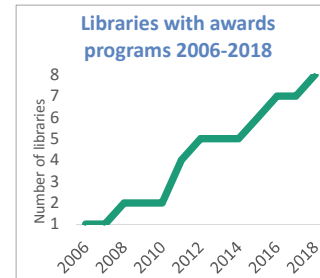- institutional promotion
- faculty-librarian collaboration
- detailed guidance for applicants
- framing of the award (celebration of student accomplishment vs. promotion of library resources).

Libraries with awards programs 2006-2018

Institutional promotion of winning entries and celebration of winners

Number of libraries

- awards integrated within a larger university research fair
- winners celebrated at university-hosted awards ceremony
- winners celebrated at library-hosted awards ceremony
- winning entries submitted to an undergraduate journal
- winning entries hosted on an institutional repository

Faculty participation in library awards program

Number of libraries

- faculty on judging panel
- recommendation from faculty required
- both

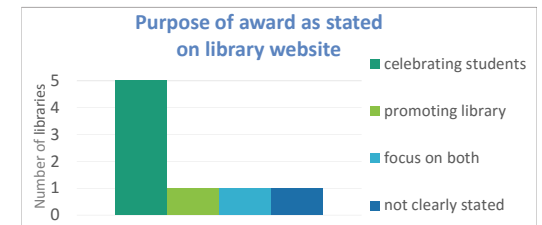| University	1st award	# of prizes	$ amount
Memorial University*	2011	1	500
McGill University	2018	4	500, 1000
University of Ottawa	2011	3	200, 350, 500
University of Toronto**	2016	6	1000
York University	2013	2	200, 600
University of Regina	2012	1	1000
University of Alberta	2006	1	500
University of Victoria	2015	1	1000

*Memorial program temporarily paused in 2018
**U of T Scarborough offers a research award with no essay
Brock University offered an award 2008-2012

Libraries providing complete judging rubric or detailed tips for the essay

- 1 12% judging rubric
- 5 63% essay tips
- 2 25% neither tips nor rubric

Further Research

In making visible the adjustments to my poster title I am also making explicit my evolving expectations as to the future directions of this preliminary study. Some of the more complex questions I proposed, related to potential tensions between the individual interests of prize applicants and the institutional interests of the award-granting libraries, have yet to fully emerge as especially thorny issues worthy of primary consideration.

Purpose of award as stated on library website

Number of libraries

- celebrating students
- promoting library
- focus on both
- not clearly stated

What do you think?

While my intention has been to further investigate via semi-structured interviews with librarians involved in Canadian awards programs, I hope to use your feedback to inform and shape my future path.

Are my initial questions part of a deeper story? Is there a completely different one to share? What more might you want to know? — Tell me now, or at: **http://bit.do/ugrad**

References

Bury, S. et al. (2017). Celebrating undergraduate students' research at York University. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 11(2), 4.

Tchangalova, N. et al. (2015). Library award for undergraduate research: Increasing the library profile. *Practical Academic Librarianship*, 4(2), 1-27

Best, J. (2008). Prize proliferation. *Sociological Forum*, 23(1), 1-27.

Université Concordia UNIVERSITY

LIBRARY