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Heidi Blackburn

University of Nebraska at Omaha, hblackburn@unomaha.edu

Claire E. Chamley

University of Nebraska at Omaha, cchamley@unomaha.edu

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Color Me Calm: Adult Coloring in the University Library

Heidi Blackburn hblackburn@unomaha.edu and Claire Chamley cchamley@unomaha.edu
Criss Library, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182

Abstract

In early summer 2015, a local newspaper reported on adults in the Omaha-metro area joining in on adult coloring. While a student coloring club formed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the fall, no such organization existed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Capitalizing on the growing adult coloring trend and local interest, Criss Library held several events entitled "Color Me Calm" during the 2015-2016 academic year, both independently and during a campus-wide event known as "De-Stress Fest." This event is held in partnership multiple departments and groups across the UNO campus, including the Academic and Career Development Center, Civic and Social Responsibility, Maverick Productions, Student Involvement, Student Government, UNO Bookstore, and Wellness Subdivision. Collaborating with these organizations put "Color Me Calm" on the official list of activities and strengthened our partnerships with these departments.

Coloring is an amazing library program:

- **All ages** (First-years through adult learners)
- **All backgrounds** (all cultures have art and drawing)
- **All abilities** (transcends learning or social disabilities)
- **All interests** (sports, sci-fi, fantasy, pop culture)
- **All budgets** (supplies was on-hand, donated, or cheap)
- **All spaces** (no special equipment or set-ups)



The Adult Coloring Phenomenon



An activity usually reserved for children, coloring books for adults rose from hipster trend to global phenomenon beginning in 2013. Adults flock to the activity for a variety of reasons, including stress relief, socialization, as a way to unplug from technology or even a way to hedge social status by appearing trendy. Participants report enjoying the tactile, interactive nature of the books as a respite from constant screen time.

Coloring books shot to the top of the Best Sellers list on Amazon and were prominently displayed in book and craft stores. For example, between 2013 and 2015, the mega-hit *Secret Garden* sold more than 5 million copies in 22 languages, marking the 96-page collection of black-and-white ink drawing a global best seller.

Social media fuelled the trend when fans began posting their elaborate creations on Facebook and Pinterest. As their popularity grew, celebrities joined the craze and even Martha's Vineyard offered coloring opportunities for its elite vacationers. Popular culture coloring books soon appeared featuring *Star Wars*, *Game of Thrones*, *Doctor Who*, *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock*, *Mad Men*, *Grumpy Cat* and several editions with swear words in fanciful designs. Even mega-store IKEA launched 5 free pages online for budding interior designers. Eventually, themed coloring events starting appearing, such as "Star Wars," "Color between the Wines" and The Hopping Gnome Taproom's "Coloring and Beer."

Many therapists are quick to point out adult coloring was not in the traditional arsenal of techniques for art therapy and should not be labeled as such (Schwedel, 2015; Malchiodi, 2015). To date, there have been no empirical studies offering evidence of health benefits from using coloring books, despite the media quoting several art therapy studies (Curry & Kasser, 2005; Drake & Winner, 2012; Dovy, 2015).

Resources

Getting staff buy-in:

- Proposed the idea in August before school started based on trending topic on Facebook and news outlets
- Criss Library was not doing a lot of outreach programming
- Timed with midterms when not a lot of campus activities were happening to address stress
- Sold as a low-cost, low-maintenance program with no special training or skills required for volunteers

Preparation for the events:

- **Space:** We have a great lobby space that has a lot of traffic that we could use. How do we balance patron needs for space with the visibility of a high traffic area?
- **Time:** How do we convince people to take an hour or two to "babysit" the supplies? How much time does this take out of our schedules to coordinate volunteers, purchase supplies, and market the event?
- **Copyright:** Everything was taken from Pinterest from artists willing to share original designs or fan art drawn to be a coloring page. Pages were limited to 5 or fewer copies at a time to gauge patron interest. We saved about 30 different designs including trending inspirational quotes, abstracts, animals, mandalas, and sci-fi/fantasy.
- **Marketing:** We created fliers, distributed the information to student weekly email newsletter and faculty daily email, as well as put up table tents in library. A mobile flat-screen TV was placed at the front doors to direct people to the area and let them know the hours of the event.
- **Supplies:** We purchased two 24-count packs of Sharpies. Crayons and Crayola markers were donated. A staff member donated two colored pencil sets and two coloring books after Christmas. We also bought some glitter glue which we will be replacing with gel pens in future events.



Lessons Learned

Problem: Attendance spiked, reserved seats were poached

Solution: We will segregate this area with ropes/streamers next time to make it more visible and welcoming to program participants so people don't have to sit on the floor.



Problem: Too early, held when convenient for staff (not patrons)

Solution: Staff stayed over the dinner hour and attendance jumped since students tend to visit the library later in the day.

Problem: Too many varying tastes for designs

Finding pages for everyone caused headaches and popular designs waned between sessions. Some were very popular and we constantly had to make copies, but some pages from Archives and Special Collections appealed to some but were "too weird" for others.



Solution: Two archives photos will be kept and other designs rotated out to simplify the process and reduce student overload. A Criss Library Pinterest page for coloring pages was created for students to access more designs.



Problem: Too little staff

Some patrons showed up at 10 minutes until the end of the program and we had to balance taking supplies away from stressed out students with staff overtime hours. Marketing and outreach also took time from daily duties.



Solution: Criss Library hired an Instruction and Outreach Librarian to coordinate programming (lucky us!). A student worker was also hired to design digital media for use in/outside the library. Volunteers were also secured from multiple departments so we had more staff to spread across the longer program time. Late participants will also be warned before they sit down that they have a limited amount of time to use the supplies but can take the coloring pages with them.



Marketing



We used Facebook and Twitter several days before event, the day before event, and the morning of the event, as well as while the event was happening. We also put out fliers in table tents and advertised in the weekly student email newsletter.

Problem: We don't have a lot of followers on Facebook or Twitter...

Solution: Partnering across campus
We were approached to participate in De-Stress Fest 2015 at the last minute. In 2016, we are planning to have many different activities during this event. They provide a ton of marketing for us (social media, fliers, posters) so we don't have to take it on and the many different departments have a larger social media following. We posted the fliers in the library and highlighted the Color Me Calm event. Smaller versions were made into table tents. The Thompson Learning Community also reached out to us to have a sign-in sheet for their first-generation participants. We provided a sign-in sheet but did not check IDs or make sure these students stayed to participate.

Conclusion and Future Outreach

We went from 63 participants and no partnerships to 110 participants and collaborations with 10 other campus programs within the academic year. Our future coloring events include participating in De-Stress Fest at scheduled times as well as leaving the supplies out for people to use at the make-n-take stations during other library events. We will also have coloring events during the summer to provide opportunities for staff on campus who can't get away during the year as well as students attending summer courses.



Selected References

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Grab a marker and color yourself calm anywhere on the poster!