IT’S A PAINT PARTY! HOW TO ENGAGE STUDENTS AND BRING COLOR TO YOUR LIBRARY DURING A CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

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THE WALL
In May, 2017 the Walsh University Library gained a new “roommate” – a large plywood box that covered a construction zone where our Library was getting connected the newest building on campus, the Global Learning Center. The wall was scheduled to be up from May through December 2017.

Wall Challenges
• The wall was one of the first thing library visitors saw when entering the library.
• Our second floor was divided – we had to give directions to a back staircase for access to one side of the second floor.

THE IDEA
The idea for a Paint Night came from an article that librarian Katie Hutchison read about Barnard College in College & Research Libraries News. Katie partnered with Director of Library Services, LuAnn Boris, for the project. We started by getting approval from our Dean of Academic Services and planning goals.

The Paint Night event had three goals:
1. Engage students in a fun library activity
2. Lessen library anxiety in our first year students by making the library a more welcoming space
3. Make our library a little more colorful.

PLANNING THE PARTY
We emailed Jenna Freedman and Shannon O’Neill at Barnard for insights and suggestions. At their recommendation, we sectioned off the wall into 18”x24” rectangles - this way we could keep the space equitable among participants.

We chose Thursday afternoon for the event since afternoon was a time when the most librarians and library staff members were around to assist

Painting supplies were purchased or brought in from home. Drop cloths were provided by our Facilities Department.

LET’S PAINT THIS THING!
On Thursday, September 7, from 2:00-4:00 in the afternoon, the Walsh University Library hosted our Paint Party!

All participants signed in, acknowledging that they accepted the rules for participation. A large portion of the rules list came from Freedman and O’Neill’s painting event held at Barnard. Additional rules were added based on suggestions from Walsh University librarians and staff.

We also let participants know that we would be taking photographs for our social media. If someone did not want to have their photo taken, they needed to alert Katie.

CONCLUSIONS
Fifteen students participated in Paint Night along with one faculty and one staff member.

Although there was not a big turn out for our Paint Night, we consider this event a success because we met all of our goals:
1. Painting was a fun experience for those who participated.
2. First year students found the wall interesting and welcoming and had many questions about it during the library’s orientation sessions. We hope it helped lessen library anxiety but did not formally survey freshmen about this.
3. The painted wall brought both color and conversation into our library for several months.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Make sure you have plenty of drop cloths, painter’s tape, and rags on hand in case there is a spill.
• Offer more than one time slot for painting. Multiple students commented in the following weeks and months how they wished they could paint something, but either did not know about the event or were unable to participate at our scheduled time.
• Establish guidelines about what can and cannot be painted.
• Involve the Art Club, art majors, and anyone else who can help you spread the word about your event.
• Take lots of photos both before and after!
• Label the space with your event name. Although marketing should have reached all students, many were confused as to why the wall was decorated.
• Encourage faculty and staff, both from inside and outside the library, to get involved too.

FAREWELL TO “THE WALL”
“The Wall” came down during Winter Break in December 2017. The space was revamped to accommodate passage to the newest building on campus, the Marlene & Joe Toot Global Learning Center. But when it came down we realized we’d never taken a photo of the painted wall in its entirety!

REFERENCES

SPECIAL THANKS
Thanks must be given to Jenna Freedman and Shannon O’Neill of Barnard College for their many insights and suggestions. We also need to thank our graphic design intern Kaci Bucklew, and Bill Myers from the Walsh University Physical Facilities Department for providing drop cloths, ladders, and more.