Three College Skill Share

Hello, my name is Elli Blaine, and this past year was my last year at Wellesley. Though I am unfortunately unable to attend the Three College retreat, I’d like to share a little with you about my experience working across campuses this past year.

On April 6th, 2013, we put on the Three College Sustainability Skill Share, made possible with the support of the Three-College Mellon Innovation Fund Grant.The mission of the Skill Share is to connect the Babson, Olin, and Wellesley community through collaborative learning. We seek to annually create a space for the sharing of practical skills to live more happy, creative, and sustainable lives, and to document these skills and make them easily accessible through a Skill Share Zine. We promote the idea of participatory learning and collective knowledge because we are all teachers and we are all students.

The skill share was born out of a wish I had two years ago: to put on an event that would showcase the skills and knowledge that students have outside of the classroom. The grant this year made that wish come alive. The Skill Share was a day-long event, hosted by Olin, that brought faculty, staff, and students together from all three campuses to teach and attend workshops.

We had an application process for students and faculty that wanted to teach a workshop. They came up with what they wanted to teach and how. In this way, we really saw each person take ownership for their own demonstration and education. Some of the grant funds went towards helping workshop leaders purchase the materials they needed for the workshop attendees. The teachers received support and direction about logistics and overall goals, but we did not dictate what the Skill Share would look like prior to teachers’ applications. We really wanted to see what people wanted to teach, and what they wanted to learn.

45-minute workshops were led by students and faculty across campuses. Some of the workshops included Beekeeping, an Intro to Permaculture, Windowsill Gardening, Soap Making, Building a Cob Oven, Bike Repair, and even one on Poetry and Concept Maps. We also had people lead round-table discussions on topics of interest, including one on “Freeganism” and another on “Back-country Ethics.” During the lunch break, there was an Expo where students could walk around and see brief demonstrations or displays, including Found Objects Art, Guerilla Kite Mapping, and Making Yogurt.

We really wanted the Skill Share to be a participatory and collaborative event. One of the great aspects of the Skill Share was seeing everyone come together and have conversations about what they were learning and doing. We started off the day with an activity called the “Lo-Tech Social Network.” This began with people drawing a personal profile with their name and interests on a 3x5 card. We posted these on a large whiteboard, and people drew lines to connect different profiles, adding information about how they were connected – like “went to school with…” or “had a class with…” or “went on a hike with…” This got people moving around and talking with each other right at the start of the day, and set a good tone for the workshops to come.

One of the key challenges of the Skill Share was coordinating across campuses, and laying a good foundation for communication and for getting work done effectively, smoothly, and enjoyably. It was also a challenge to determine the best schedule for the day. We wanted everyone who applied to teach to have time during the Skill Share. In retrospect, though we had over 50 attendees throughout the day, offering so many workshops at the same time-slot diluted the attendance for each individual workshop.

Overall, the Skill Share was a motivating and successful event that brought people together in a new type of educational environment. With a range of workshops for peoples’ interests, everyone had different interactions, and learned different skills in a collaborative way. Before the Skill Share day, each workshop leader made a half-page description of what they were teaching. These were all collected and made into a Skill Share Zine (a mini magazine), and handed out the day of the event with the schedule. The Skill Share Zine will become an electronic living document for the skills shared, and will be added to with next year’s Skill Share. We hope that as skill shares continue, the document will become a good guide for students, faculty, and staff across campuses, and will be passed down to younger generations of students at all three Colleges.

Thank you for listening to a little of what the Skill Share was like in 2013, and thank you to everyone that made the event possible.