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## BI VIGNETTES

# Promoting Library Research: The Research Review Competition

By Clementine Lewis

*This column describes the Research Review Competition, a program developed by the Library at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York to promote research and writing skills. The Competition, which since 1980 has recognized well-written research papers that reflect mastery of library research skills, is a success with students and faculty, and highlights the library's role in the academic process.*

The Library at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York responds to the instructional needs of a large and diverse student population by teaching information-gathering skills through various user-education programs such as tours, small group orientations, and course-integrated instruction. The Library also provides one-on-one instruction at the Reference Desk and offers a three-credit liberal arts course on methods of library research. As an additional way of encouraging and supporting research efforts at the College, the Library developed a Research Review Competition to reward students for writing papers that reflect their mastery of library research skills.

Since 1980, the Library at LaGuardia has offered this successful annual competition to promote its role in teaching the research process. Each academic year, college-wide announcements invite students and faculty to submit current research papers that have been written for LaGuardia courses and received a grade of "A." During the last month of the academic year, all papers are reviewed and rated by a panel of judges, who determine three winners. This article describes the Research Review Competition for the benefit of librarians seeking a program to highlight their own library's role in the academic process.

### **Background of the Research Review Competition**

Initially, several Library faculty members met with faculty from the English Department to solicit their participation in the Research Review Competition. As a result of this meeting, a Research Review Panel was formed to develop the competition and judge the papers. The Panel included faculty representation from various academic disciplines. Yet it was also developed as a Library committee, with Library faculty as the chairperson(s).

The Panel's first several meetings addressed the following questions:

- Which research papers would qualify to compete?
- What criteria should be used for judging them?
- What rewards should be given to students, and who should provide these rewards?
- How should the competition be promoted?

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## **Requirements and Guidelines for Competing**

The Research Review Panel Soon determined three requirements for the research papers: (1) they must have been written for LaGuardia Community College classes; (2) they must have received a grade of “A” from the classroom instructor; and (3) they must have been written during the current academic year. In addition, two guidelines concerning acknowledgement of sources were established: (1) all entries had to include correct footnotes, end-notes, or internal documentation; and (2) a minimum of three sources in the bibliography had to be annotated. These guidelines were later amended to read that each paper submitted must demonstrate an accepted form of documentation (MLA, APA, etc.). See also Appendix A.

## **Rating Criteria and Process for Judging Papers**

To establish a process for judging the research papers, the Research Review Panel first familiarized themselves with departmental course requirements for research papers at LaGuardia. Then, the Panel created a list of criteria that would reflect both these departmental requirements and mastery of library research skills:

- The main idea (thesis) must be well defined and well expressed.
- The research paper must have an effective introduction and conclusion.
- Each paragraph in the paper must develop the thesis.
- The flow of ideas from one paragraph to the next must be clear.
- References to outside authorities must be timely (as the topic allows), relevant, and applicable to developing the thesis.
- The text must demonstrate skillful integration of original ideas with documented facts and opinions of others.
- Sentences must be free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- Sentences must demonstrate variety in length and structure. In addition, words and phrases must be economical and precise.
- A consistency of citation and bibliographic form must be rigorously maintained.
- The annotation must be both analytical and descriptive, yet brief.

For each of the ten criteria listed above, points are assigned as follows:

- 0 - No Control
- 1 - Little Control
- 2 - Average Control
- 3 - Skilled Control

Each paper receives a total score from each member of the Research Review Panel. Later, the scores are tallied and compared to determine the first, second, and third place winners.

## **The Judging Process**

The judging process has changed over the years to reflect the views and suggestions of Panel members. During each academic year, the Panel meets to review the competition requirements and guidelines and to make any necessary changes in the rating and judging criteria. Presently, the judging process works as follows: The Chairperson of the Panel reviews the papers as they are submitted to ensure that they meet the competition requirements, and has copies made for each member. S/he then convenes a meeting to distribute the research papers for review, discussion, and individual rating. At this meeting, Panel members may consider how to treat papers that are not traditional research papers, such as report papers. The Panel may also have to decide how to rate papers that do not comply with all of the guidelines.

Over the next week or so, members send the Chairperson their ratings for each paper. Then a second meeting is called, at which the Chairperson brings a tally sheet listing the total points each research paper has received. The Panel reviews these ratings, addresses questions or reservations of individual members, decides on the ranking of papers with identical scores, and then declares, the first, second, and third place winners.

### **Awarding the Prizes**

The Panel decided to honor all research paper finalists during the annual "Honors Night" Ceremony with an Outstanding Academic Award (given to students for Outstanding academic accomplishments in the past year). Participation in this ceremony provides positive publicity for the Research Review Competition. Originally, the Alumni Association donated a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond to the first place winner and \$75 and \$50 Bonds to the second and third place winners. In the 1994-95 academic year, the Faculty Council offered to support the competition by providing the U.S. Savings Bonds prizes for winners. Hence, several members of the Faculty Council were invited to participate as judges.

In another move to increase favorable publicity and encourage participation in the competition, the Panel decided that all students who submit papers should receive a Certificate of Participation. This certificate is signed by the President of the College, the Chairperson of the Library, the Chairperson of the Research Review Panel, and the chairperson of the funding organization (such as the Alumni Association or the Faculty Council).

### **Promoting the Competition**

From the beginning, the Panel has distributed memoranda, flyers, and attractive posters throughout the College. Special announcements, supplied to student organizations (e.g., student government office, clubs, newspapers), describe the competition and the application process. The Panel also places announcements in the "LaGuardia Monthly Calendar of Events."

Librarians at the Reference Desk in the Library, where entries must be submitted, are always available to provide additional assistance and information. During the last 15 years, the Panel has displayed previous winning research papers on bulletin boards and in exhibit cases. These also provide information on the program, and gently encourage students to participate.

The Panel also decided that classroom instructors who encouraged their students to participate should be recognized. Instructors of students whose papers win an award are invited to attend the Honors Night Ceremony with their students, and are also sent a letter of acknowledgement from the Research Review Panel.

### **Conclusion**

The enthusiasm expressed by students and faculty for the competition has been very encouraging. The number of students who participate has grown steadily each year. To date, more than 200 students have entered papers, and at least 40 have been declared winners. Many of the student participants have indicated that they feel more confident in their ability to do library research. Moreover, they are pleased to receive certificates that showcase and commemorate their experience in the research competition.

Much of the competition's success can be attributed to the collaborative and innovative efforts of the faculty, who have worked diligently to keep the program exciting. They are delighted that they can refer their students to a program that enriches the research writing experience and publicizes their work. Moreover, the faculty participants on the Research Review Panel have described their experiences positively, indicating that the competition has provided helpful insights into the subject matter and the teaching methods of various academic disciplines.

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Finally, the competition has benefited the Library in several ways. Because of the information it yields on current research topics in various classes, it is a great collection development tool. It provides an excellent opportunity for faculty members from diverse academic disciplines to obtain firsthand knowledge about the library's part in teaching research skills. Perhaps most important, by promoting research and writing, the competition highlights the vital role that the Library plays in the academic process.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Research Review Competition**

#### **Rules for Entry**

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The Research Review Competition is jointly sponsored by the Library and Faculty Council. Awards for excellence in writing a research paper will be presented to winners on Student Honors Night each September. Entries will be judged by a panel of faculty members. All of the decisions of the Research Review Panel are final.

#### **I. Research Paper Defined**

For the purpose of this competition, the research paper is defined as an expository paper on a single subject. Writer must demonstrate skillful integration of original ideas with documented facts and opinions of others.

#### **II. Eligibility and Nomination Procedures**

1. Research papers that receive a **grade** of “**A**” in a LaGuardia course during the current academic year may be nominated either by the student author or by the instructor who graded the paper.
2. **No entry will be considered unless it is accompanied by the attached cover sheet and meets all of the basic requirements outlined below.**

#### **III. Basic Requirements of the Research Paper**

1. All entries must demonstrate the student's knowledge of essay structure (i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion), correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as a mature vocabulary and style.
2. All entries must include correct footnotes, endnotes, or internal documentation. A minimum of three sources in the bibliography must be annotated. If the original paper did not have an annotated bibliography, this must be added for purposes of the competition. The annotations should demonstrate the student's ability to locate and critically evaluate a variety of information sources.

#### **IV. Submit all entries to the Research Review Panel in the Library**

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