Virtual Valencia Village Moves their Medieval and Renaissance Fair Online

By: Annie Rogers, Emerging Tech Library Specialist, Valencia College Winter Park Campus

Valencia College Winter Park campus is the home to the Valencia Medieval and Renaissance Fair, a community feature since 2017. Humanities faculty member Elizabeth Faulcon organizes the fair which is populated by interactive presentations and student booths on a wide range of topics, from chain mail to the Black Death. To aid their research, the Winter Park Campus Library supported the students through traditional classroom library instruction and individual research consultations.

Valencia Medieval and Renaissance Fair 2019/ photo courtesy of Elizabeth Faulcon

The event grew each year and there were plans to move it into the Winter Park community on a larger scale. Yet, as with so many projects planned for the 2020 – 2021 academic year, things were put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

After moving entirely online in March 2020, the question was not if the fair would happen, but how it would be held online successfully. Following the first uncertain weeks of remote learning, it soon became clear that the college would remain online for some time. Professor Faulcon worked with web designer Samantha Moore, who is an avid teacher and student of medieval history, to bring the Medieval and Renaissance Fair online.[1]

Featured student projects served as the main content of the in-person fair and the goal was to keep their work as a focal point of the virtual fair. Professor Faulcon partnered with Winter Park Campus's library professionals to help students with this transition. Adam Johnson, emerging tech librarian, and Annie Rogers, emerging tech library specialist, brought their expertise in technology and library resources to the virtual classroom through Zoom library instruction, live and pre-recorded tutorials, and embedded librarianship.

The learning objectives were developed to highlight necessary online academic skills. This included navigating library database and web searches to choose a topic that falls within the either the medieval or renaissance time period, identifying various sources of information to create an artifact for which they have a personal interest or which fits within their career goals, and finally, developing skills in research and critical thinking, which encourages them to become lifelong learners.

Rogers's background in digital humanities provided necessary tools to adapt traditional humanities projects for the online environment. Rogers led step-by-step tutorials with both traditional and newer software that students used to create their virtual projects. The resources included Screencast-O-Matic (an open-source screen recording program) and Canva (design toolkit) among many traditional software packages.

Johnson provided library instruction via Zoom video conferencing in scheduled sessions and during Real Time Virtual (RTV) classes. Additionally, Johnson practiced embedded librarianship in Faulcon's Canvas courses where the students had the ability to ask questions and request one-on-one research consultations.

Faulcon's students responded well to the online instruction and tutorials and remained engaged and enthusiastic about their project topics. The resulting artifacts show true understanding of their subjects and are an example that online learning can be exciting. Featured projects can be viewed on the Valencia Village website.[2]

Featured Student Project - Physicians and Medicine: The Black Death (click on picture to watch)

The Spring Fair

The inaugural Valencia Village in fall 2020 was successful in bringing the ideas of the Valencia Medieval and Renaissance Fair online. As the college remained online through spring 2021, Faulcon opted to hold the second Valencia Village online.

This time, Faulcon emphasized external student and staff engagement. The team worked on attracting student participation with a Shakespearian scavenger hunt, the Search for the Bard. The team also held an information session for Valencia faculty and staff to showcase Valencia Village and provide insight on moving an established event online. These changes, along with a stronger social media presence boosted the engagement for the spring fair.

Results

The Valencia Village Medieval and Renaissance Fair continues to be a learning experience for the educators and professionals involved. Students are engaged and enjoy working in the online environment. The remote library instruction and technology tutorials aided students' ability to create a comprehensive virtual project. When asked if the virtual library instruction and online tutorials helped, most students offered positive feedback with 97 percent of surveyed students responding they have a better understanding of their topic after the project was complete.

Future Goals

As the chances of returning to campus get stronger for fall 2021, the fate of ValenciaVillage.org remains in question. Valencia plans to embrace a hybrid environment, as many are likely to do even after we are attending concerts and sporting events again.

As students and employees look forward to experiencing the in-person aspects of the fair, the reach and accessibility of a virtual Valencia Village will likely become a permanent fixture of the fair. The team looks forward to growing and changing with advancements in technology and digital humanities.

We invite everyone to visit the virtual fair on Valencia College's Winter Park Learning Support Instagram.[3]

Scavenger Hunt Instagram Promotion/ photo courtesy of Annie Rogers

[1]https://www.valenciavillage.org/
[2]https://www.valenciavillage.org/featured-projects
[3]https://www.instagram.com/lss_valenciawp/