what does it meme?
visual literacy programming in the library through the language of memes
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Uplifting Memes is a year-long library outreach and instruction program themed around memes. Internet memes are phrases, images, animations, or videos that are copied, adapted, remixed, and shared across social media and person-to-person. Memes have become almost ubiquitous on the internet and are part of everyday life for many college students.

While memes are typically associated with simple humor and informal social critique, they are also increasingly the subject of serious academic inquiry in media studies, political science, and linguistics, among many other fields. At the same time, while students are creating and sharing memes outside of the context of their coursework, little pedagogical emphasis has been placed on memes as new visual media forms with their own metorical frameworks. Thus, memes create a relevant lens through which students can engage with questions and dispositions for interacting with a visual information culture.

We developed this program as a University Libraries Innovation and Program Enrichment Grant proposal, which awards up to $2500 to a support for a project that innovatively enhance(s) and expand(s) library services and programs’ each year. Our proposal included plans for a series of interactive workshops and guest speakers, a student art contest and show, and a student-curated digital meme collection. The project was selected to receive the grant award for 2019-2020, and we have been able to develop a program curriculum that emphasizes visual literacy.

Visual literacy is a set of abilities, critical thinking strategies, and affective dispositions that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and other visual media. This includes:

- What’s the Memeing in the Message? Memes as Political Discourse: Activist Art, and Propaganda
- Designing and creating meaningful images and visual media
- Interpreting and analyzing the meanings of images and visual media
- Evaluating images and their sources
- Using images and visual media effectively and ethically
- Let’s Get Ethical: Copyright, Fair Use, and Attribution for Memes
- Finding Meme-spiration with Public Domain and Critical Creative Commons Media
- The Future is Weird: Artificial Intelligence’s Potential Impact on Memes and Other Visual Media
- Nothing New Under the Sun: Art History on the Internet and RI
- Memes at the Museum: Blow- Locking and Visual Analysis for Memes and Contemporary Art
- Meme Workshop: Demonstrating Cross-Promotion
- Evaluating images and their sources
- Uplifting memes

As adapted from the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, lifting memes is a set of abilities, critical thinking strategies, and affective dispositions that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and other visual media.

In addition to our planned spring events and projects, we will continue to reach out to teaching faculty, but also engage in direct outreach to students, clubs and groups related to art, media, and pop culture.

Challenges

“Attendance isn’t mandatory.”

What’s the Memeing in the Message?

Memes used by student art and lit magazine, The Coraddi, on their Facebook page.

We have struggled with student attendance at our events thus far, despite advertising widely and receiving publicity from the library and campus-wide communications. In the future, we will continue to reach out to teaching faculty, but also engage in direct outreach to student clubs and groups related to art, media, and pop culture.

Collabs

We are collaborating with campus partners such as the Weatherston Art Museum and HNaC (The Humanities Network and Consortium). Our spring art show will also be judged by library colleagues in Research, Outreach, and Instruction, Preservation Services, and Digital Projects.

Future Directions

When you finish a research paper

and can finally close all the tabs.

In addition to our planned spring events and projects, we are interested in developing a repository of meme-related assignments and activities contributed by faculty from across the curriculum at UNCG and beyond.