

FWI Funding Statement

Name: Ine Wauben, Laura Lawson, Parminder Raina

Faculty/Area: Health Sciences

Project title: CLSA Student Project

Please summarize how the FWI funds have been spent:

A summary by broad category is sufficient, line by line accounting of individual expenditures is not required unless specifically requested.

Alternatively, please provide a copy of your FAS for the accounts that have been used for the FWI funds.

Salaries and benefits: \$3,500 (pending)

Equipment: \$900 (some expenses pending)

Event Costs: N/A

Other (please specify):

Balance remaining: \$600

Please indicate how the balance will be spent and when you anticipate that the funds will be exhausted. The remaining funds will be used to cover the costs of print materials for the CLSA participant feedback survey and the Healthy Aging Ambassadors campaign. The projected timeline to exhaust the funds is August 2014.

Please submit separately a maximum 2-page summary of the results of the project with particular attention to the following details:

1. How has the project fostered collaboration and interdisciplinarity?
 - a. Have other projects been initiated as a result of this project?
 - b. If it was recommended in your award letter that you connect with particular individuals/groups, have you done so and what was the result?
 - c. Have you worked with others who have or have not been funded through the current RFP?
2. How has the project exposed students to new or emerging research?
3. How has the project offered students an experience beyond traditional borders?
4. How has the project challenged the confines of existing programming and advanced new paradigms of research or education?
5. How will the outcomes of the project be sustained or expanded?
6. Please outline any barriers or challenges that may have prevented you from achieving some of your project goals.

The financial and project reports can be submitted to fwl@mcmaster.ca.

Forward With Integrity Final Report CLSA Student Communications Project

Introduction

In May 2013, the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, a national, long-term study of health and aging, was awarded \$5,000 in Forward with Integrity funding to develop a student research communications project. The goal of the project was to help McMaster students gain exposure to research approaches and develop skills in translating health research knowledge for a diverse audience.

Project Overview

The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) hired a work-study student for the summer 2013 term to evaluate current communications tools used to engage participants and other stakeholders in the CLSA and other longitudinal studies. Based on the findings from the research review, the student developed a survey to evaluate participant attitudes toward the CLSA. The goal of the survey was to answer the following questions: 1) How do research participants feel about participating in a McMaster-led longitudinal research study?; 2) What motivates their participation in this research project?; and 3) How can researchers improve the way they interact and share information with participants?

The student also evaluated the interactions on the CLSA website and social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook) and compared these trends to other longitudinal studies and health organizations with a specific focus on aging. The findings were compiled into a report, which included key recommendations for engaging participants using traditional and new media tools.

Following this initial stage of the project, the CLSA determined there were opportunities to engage additional students in the Forward With Integrity initiative. Through the development of a Healthy Aging Ambassador program, McMaster students from the life sciences, Health, Aging and Society and the Communications Studies and Multimedia programs were invited to get hands-on experience to learn how to interact, engage and disseminate health research to various community stakeholders.

Project Outcomes

A participant feedback survey was developed and the content was finalized in fall 2013. Dissemination of the survey will take place in mid-2014 as part of the annual participant newsletter.

A comprehensive review was conducted of social media tools currently used being used by the CLSA and other longitudinal studies. Gaps were identified and a plan was introduced to better engage participants and the general public through social media and online communication channels.

Based on the recommendation of the Forward with Integrity reviewers, additional students were engaged in the project. The CLSA provided two internships for students enrolled in the Communications Studies and Multimedia program during the fall and winter semesters. These students, along with the original work-study student, were involved in developing a “Healthy Aging Ambassador” social media campaign to foster increased engagement in the CLSA. The campaign was themed around health promotion and raising awareness about age-related conditions and the factors associated with the aging process. Efforts were made to draw linkages between the health promotion themes and the CLSA research. To date, themes have included: Alzheimer awareness, cardiovascular health and nutrition.

To recruit Healthy Aging Ambassadors, the CLSA students working on the project approached McMaster student, academic and research groups with an interest in aging. Members were invited to sign up for the campaign by attending an orientation session, which included a presentation by one of the student leads.

As CLSA Healthy Aging Ambassadors, students receive monthly emails that outline a specific theme related to healthy aging as well as a short list of items that they are required to tweet, post and share. The social media content of the emails is developed by the CLSA work-study students/interns to foster a better understanding of the importance of health promotion and knowledge translation. Oversight is provided by the CLSA communications manager and members of the research team.

Since the launch of the campaign, the CLSA has seen increased traffic to its website and greater engagement on its social media platforms, especially with the weekly reach of CLSA Facebook posts and the number of people liking or commenting on posts, and also following the CLSA on Twitter. There has also been considerable interest from students and student groups on campus. To date, 35 students have indicated an interest in the campaign. Students who participate as Healthy Aging Ambassadors receive a certificate of achievement, along with opportunities to provide feedback on further developing the campaign.

Project Challenges/Barriers

The project was delayed two months following an unexpected sick leave of the CLSA communications manager. It also took considerable time to get approval of the participant feedback survey at the level of the scientific management team in order to consider the impact on participants. Engaging students and student groups mid-semester was a challenge due to competing academic commitments.

Future Directions

Following the completion of the four-month pilot, the CLSA will examine the feasibility of rolling out the campaign more broadly to the Hamilton community, and potentially participants and other stakeholders. The CLSA intends to create ongoing placement opportunities for students to get hands on-experience and learn how to interact, engage and disseminate health research to various stakeholders. The CLSA will explore various funding opportunities to support these next steps, including knowledge translation grants, institutional student work programs and internships.