
The Friday Finish

Incentivizing Student Success and Building Partnerships

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Abstract

Sunday evenings are busy for academic libraries as students struggle to catch up on a weekend's worth of work and hit midnight assignment deadlines. The Friday Finish was created to encourage students to be productive on Fridays before relaxing for the weekend. To incentivize students to come into the library and stay there, it provides food throughout the day and features additional activities, including wellness consults, financial advisors, crafts, chair massages, animal shows, and more. This paper will discuss our successes and challenges.

Event Background

Students have been known to wait until the last minute to complete their weekly homework resulting in the "Sunday Scaries." Nowhere is this more visible than in campus libraries, filled with frantic students every Sunday. The Ruth Lilly Dean of University Libraries for Indiana University, Diane Dallis-Comentale, noticed this phenomenon and began brainstorming ways to help. She reasoned that combatting the Sunday Scaries would not only have a positive impact on students' overall mental health, but with student retention and academic performance. The IU Libraries realized that unless there was an incentive for students to come to the library before the weekend, they would continue procrastinating. From here, library administration began brainstorming ways to encourage students to come to the library before the weekend. This is how the idea for The Friday Finish emerged. IU Libraries staff piloted the Friday Finish in the spring of 2023 at Wells Library on the Indiana University Bloomington campus. So far, the Libraries have hosted a total of 17 Friday Finishes from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024. This paper will focus on the event structure, sponsors/partners, and impact of the Friday Finish.

Event Structure

Nearly every Friday in the academic year, the Wells Library lobby is bustling with students and campus partners participating in the Friday Finish. Students have begun to expect the Friday Finish and share with event organizers that it motivates them to visit the library every week. The structure of the event follows a template. The time of the food and special

activity remains consistent each week, while the on-campus partners, sponsors, and afternoon surprises change week by week. This organizational structure allowed the event programmers to customize the afternoon surprise and snack while maintaining the structure that students came to expect.

Setup begins at 9 a.m. when IU Libraries' event and hospitality coordinator and student employees arrive. The IU Libraries event coordinator is a full-time staff member responsible for providing event and hospitality support to all library locations and programmers. She is also the designated point person and programmer responsible for executing the Friday Finish each week. Along with hourly student support, she assembles the lobby in the same way every week, so students know where to look for the resources they need. Weekly work includes moving tables and chairs into the open lobby area, setting up library owned massage chairs purchased specifically for this weekly event, rolling out library-owned table tennis equipment, and assembling a welcome table area to ensure the sponsor is situated in a prime location. Around 9:45a.m. sponsor team members arrive and are greeted and briefed on their responsibilities for the day. The sponsor typically hands out food and uses that as an opportunity to engage with hundreds of students a day.

At 11 a.m. the students set up the weekly craft on four round tables. These crafts are planned in advance by an employee from the Wells Library Maker Space- a crafting space that provides free craft supplies and tools to students. Students are encouraged to sit at these tables and create a different craft each week. Although the crafts are designed to be user-friendly, a Chaos Coordinator is stationed at the craft to answer any questions and restock materials. Some of the crafts have included sharpie mugs, pot your own succulent, card making, and more. Students report that these activities help them unwind between studying sessions.

Student staff are pivotal to the execution of this event. The Chaos Crew is the name of the student hourly workers who make the weekly activities happen in the Wells Library Lobby. When they are not assisting with the Friday Finish these students are employed in library administration as hourly employees. The event coordinator often solicits feedback on engagement ideas from these students to ensure the Friday Finish activities and giveaways remain relevant to students. Chaos Coordinators have brainstormed popular ideas such as kombucha and boba tea bars, a build-your-own Lego mini-figure activity, and Instagram content. More formally, regular surveys and check-ins with students at the Friday Finish provide direction for resource allocation and activity decisions.

In addition to event support, marketing materials for The Friday Finish were the final senior project of a paid student graphic designer and offered a less formal, relevant feel that speaks to the student audience.

Standard Schedule

10:00 a.m.- Sponsor staff hand out donuts while the Chaos Crew maintains a self-serve coffee bar.

11:00 a.m.- The partners arrive to table

12:00 p.m.- The sponsor serves pizza

2:00 p.m.- The event coordinator brings out the afternoon surprise

3:00 p.m.- The Chaos Coordinators bring the afternoon snack to the sponsors to serve

4:00 p.m.- The Chaos Coordinators and event coordinator begin clean up

Sustainability through campus-based sponsors

Those who work in higher education quickly learn food is a powerful incentive to drive student attendance, but one that is not long-lasting. To encourage students to stay and study for multiple hours on Fridays, event planners wanted to provide three different food options spaced throughout the day. For starters, we provide fruit, coffee, and donuts for the first 45 minutes, motivating students to get out of bed and to the library before supplies run out. We distribute twelve dozen donuts in less than an hour. For lunch pizza is served; 10,200 slices in the academic year, to be exact. And for the sendoff afternoon snack, weekly treats are imagined, such as a boba tea bar, apples and caramel, kombucha, popsicles, and DIY trail mix. Providing food is a crucial element of the Friday Finish success is also the most resource intensive. IU Libraries does not have the budget to purchase the amount of food needed nor the staff to serve it.

Institutions seeking to replicate the Friday Finish may feel the pressure of these resource needs. Other incentive items, such as animal visits, door prizes, and seated massage therapy, are also costly. Weekly costs average around \$3,000, not including the full-time staff hours needed to execute the event. Annual costs, therefore, can be calculated at approximately \$50,000.

Fortunately, the Friday Finish benefits students from many different academic areas in a very visible way, and the Libraries found willing partners in units and schools on campus. By offering a weekly sponsorship tied to direct costs, the Libraries were able to fund the Friday Finish entirely with external funds. Three of the 17 weeks in the 2023-2024 academic year were paid through existing annual fund gifts, and all others were funded by specific academic unit sponsors. There was little difficulty in obtaining funding for the Friday Finish due to high-level support by Library Dean Diane Dallis-Comentale. At one point, her personal invitations to her peers for Friday Finish sponsorship resulted in more sponsors than available weeks. At the end of the semester, partners and sponsors are surveyed to learn about ways to improve the experience, as well as to gauge impressions of library use of sponsorship funds. Collected comments can be shared back to the entire sponsor community through an impact report, which also offers building usage statistics.

When sponsoring a week, the academic unit must also provide two full-time staff members to serve food at the welcome station for all of the hours of the Finish. This is an opportunity for these staff members to greet students and also pitch programs and classes in

their own schools. We also offered sponsors nearly unlimited space and resources to host tables for their student organizations, special projects, or to promote activities of their choosing, such as upcoming performances at the School of Music. Because the event draws so many students, this is a real and tangible benefit to the units. Additionally, the Libraries offers to send an email to students of the participating academic unit showcasing the sponsorship, display a high rotation of digital screen ads in the library the week of the sponsorship, and provide social media and in-person recognitions of the sponsorship. For academic schools with recruitment priorities, these benefits are well worth the \$3,000 sponsorship fee and also provide a placeholder in marketing or outreach budgets for allocations of funds. Some non-academic units also sponsor the Finish, such as University Information Technology Services and Office of the Chief Health Officer. These units have outreach goals that are surpassed by the exposure offered at the Finish.

Sponsorships enable the Libraries to recover event costs and enable staff to network and connect with other campus partners during the event. Each week IU Libraries leaders meet all the unit staff and students working the sponsorship event and new ideas and partnerships are conceived that impact areas across the university and far beyond the weekly event. For example, units interacting with wellness programs during the Friday Finish have invited this campus support team to visit their own academic spaces.

Campus units were so eager to partner with the IU Libraries that we ran out of Fridays to offer, and some weeks had to be shared between two units. Sponsors contributed a total of \$39,200 to host these events in 2023-2024.

Partners

Besides feeding our students and providing fun brain-break activities, we sought to bring in partners offering on-campus resources that support academic success. These partners were different from the sponsors because they did not pay to be there, they simply tabled in exchange for visibility. Using already established librarian relationships; we invited various support units to table at the Friday Finish. To remain aligned with the event's focus on academic success, we are selective about who tables during the Friday Finish. All tables must either incentivize students or provide productivity and wellness support or activities. Some partners chose to be there every week while others were one-time only. We often declined those wishing to survey students for their own projects, for example, and do not allow student groups to use the Friday Finish to recruit members.

The Wellness Coaches from the School of Social Work were one of the partners that attended every week. Each Friday they provided free one-on-one coaching to students and brought a stress relieving activity or resource to share. The students from the School of Social Work completed this coaching as part of their practicum. This partnership was mutually beneficial because their participation aided master's students as well as undergraduates seeking support. In 2023-2024, students made 64 wellness coaching appointments in total.

Another campus partner was University Information Technology Services (UITs) who brought 3D printers to showcase. Students have access to free 3D printers while they are enrolled, but many do not know this is available. The Wells Library Makerspace brought a weekly de-stressing craft. Students have painted mugs, made terrariums, painted, crafted keychains, and more. Writing Tutorial Services (WTS), an on-campus academic resource located in the library, is also available for consultations every Friday. WTS provides review of student assignments and individualized writing instruction.

Other partners included: the Office of the Chief Health Officer, which held a Spring Break Safety question and answer session and connected students with mental health resources, including the free TimelyCare app; Recreational Sports, which held a meditation drop-in session; Substance Use Intervention Services, who handed out preventative kits with items like condoms, sunscreen, drink testing strips, and naloxone; and the Black Film Center and Archive, who screened movies. Future connections with on-campus cultural centers are being considered.

Impact

We measured the impact of the Friday Finish in multiple ways: student feedback, gate counts into the library, social media following, and library room reservations. We solicited student feedback at the final Friday Finish of each semester. If they responded to a quick paper survey, we entered them to win a prize. This was usually a LEGO set. Surveys were used to learn which activities benefited the students the most, and to identify what students do with their time in the library. Adjustments were made based on these learnings, such as discontinuing math tutoring after the pilot. Seated chair massage is an example of a costly offering that we learned was highly valued by participants. For this reason, we continue to include it in our sponsorship budget. A few highlights of what students told us:

- "I'm here every Friday & it helped me get started with my work and assignments. It gets me motivated and I'm always looking forward to it."
- "ME TIME here at HB'well Library is my every week ritual. It relaxes my mind being around Hoosiers."
- "I'm a grad student & I had a hard time managing classes, assignments & lab work. Taking out time for Friday Finish has given me so much joy while being able to explore my creative side & just switch off the academic worries."
- "I am having lab on every Friday and this Friday Finish helped me to calm myself before the lab exam."
- "Friday Finish has gotten me out of bed and working on Fridays."
- "Yes, it has pushed me to come to the library even if I'm tired which helped me get studying done in the end."

We also solicited sponsor/partner feedback at the end of the year via a Qualtrics survey designed by Library Advancement. A majority of staff and faculty participants surveyed said they felt the Friday Finish had given them opportunities to meaningfully engage with students and that budget funds were well utilized. We heard:

- "This is such a great program! I know visiting staff members wanted to integrate this into other campuses."
- "I enjoyed engaging with a variety of students in a fun, fast-paced atmosphere. I enjoyed getting to know the library staff better and to market our services in an engaging way."
- "The opportunity to meet students, faculty, and staff from across campus!"
- "So glad to hear we're going to do this again next year! Can't wait!"

Another way we obtained event data was with gate counts. From gate counts taken before and after the event, we know that there were more visitors to the library on Fridays than before the Friday Finish (not considering pre-pandemic numbers). During the pilot year of Fall 2023 we saw 8,544 visitors to the library which showed a 71% increase from the year before (4,986). We are not quite up to pre-pandemic numbers, but this improvement is a substantial one.

We also used social media to track student engagement. The Herman B Wells Library is active on Instagram mainly. It was used during the Friday Finish to post the weekly offerings, share the excitement, and try to get students to come to the event. Prior to the Friday Finish, the account had 738 profile reach which jumped to 7,100 when the event began. This 862% profile increase is likely due to students sharing content to invite a friend.

Finally, we measured the number of rooms reserved by students. Wells Library has multiple study spaces that must be reserved ahead of time. We found that there was a 36.2% increase in the number of reserved Friday study room hours in the 23/24 academic year compared to 22/23. The highest recorded hours of study room reservations were on a Friday, demonstrating how effective the event was in drawing students to the library.

Conclusion

Because of the Friday Finish initiative, Wells Library is full of students on Fridays. We have heard from numerous students that this reoccurring event is a highlight of their week that encourages them to come into the library before the weekend. They find that not having to worry about finding food and a quiet space to work allows them to focus on their homework. The Finish also connects them with resources, like peer coaching, that encourages their retention and success. Connecting students with mental health resources remains a foundational component of the Friday Finish. Activities serve as a deserved study break and a way to de-stress from the responsibilities of student life.

This project has been a campuswide collaboration between multiple units, employees, and student employees. Campus partners and academic unit sponsors who underwrite the Friday Finish receive exposure to many students which furthers their unit specific objectives. These partnerships are carefully selected to benefit student success. Soliciting feedback from students and partners was pivotal to the event's success. The event has continued to evolve and grow over the past two years, but the mission of connecting students to on-campus resources and drawing them into the library to prevent procrastination has remained the same. This event is also beneficial for library administration as it connects the Libraries with a variety

of campus connections that will remain long after the event ends. In this way, the Friday Finish directly impacts the stated library vision by increasing our visibility across the campus. Our vision says that IU Libraries will be an in-demand partner and leader in advancing research and creativity, facilitating teaching and learning, and amplifying scholarship by enabling critical thinking and discourse, cultivating an inclusive environment, and providing equitable access to diverse perspectives and resources.

For any library with similar aims toward campus indispensability, the Friday Finish model can provide numerous opportunities to explain the role modern libraries play in student academic success, without requiring diversion of financial resources from other critical areas. For this reason, IU Libraries recommends those considering a similar implementation use sponsorship models for funding versus seeking external donations or budget funding.