Hi, welcome everyone! My name is Amy Stewart, my pronouns are she/her/hers and I’m here to talk about the “You’re Not in This Alone” Thesis Zine project that took place at Reed College in Portland, Oregon and some resources available to you for your own zine projects. I have some example zines available to look at during the presentation.
I’d like to take the time and space to acknowledge the native land that we are occupying today. We acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Spokane Tribe, the Kalispel [cal-is-bell] Tribe, and the Ktunaxa [tun-AH-hah] Nation, who are stewards to the land throughout generations. As we participate in this conference and our daily lives, we keep in mind the ongoing effects of colonization, struggles for self-determination by native communities, colonial state violence, and the recognition of indigenous sovereignty. If you’d like more information, I recommend exploring the resources available on honoring native land from the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture.

Before I get started I’d also like to do an access check-in. Is the lighting okay for everyone? Please feel free to get up, move around, sit on the floor, whatever you need to feel comfortable! If you are a doodler, show me your sketches after the presentation! I will be taking questions at the end.
So, what are we doing today? I'll be talking about how the zine project worked at the Reed College Library, hopefully convincing you to consider this as a viable outreach method, and giving you some resources and practical knowledge for creating zines.
At Reed, every Senior is required to complete a thesis over the course of the final year. In the past, these theses have ranged from 4 pages to 506, but my informal estimate would be that most students write between 40 and 80 pages. The project is a huge undertaking just from a research standpoint, but it also has some strict formatting and deadline requirements. Faculty and Staff are supportive during the process. Every thesising senior has a faculty thesis advisor who they are encouraged to meet with for feedback and guidance, there are extended tutoring hours for seniors, the registrar helps seniors make sure they have met all their graduation requirements, etc. Support is spread across campus and there’s a lot of it if you know where to look! All of the critical information about support and logistics is compiled into a 30 something page document called the Senior Handbook. Every year, during the first semester, the college has hosted a Senior Sanity event to help inform students about the resources available to them on campus. Staff members from many departments have given talks in the past about what they can offer students. When I was a student, I couldn’t remember much beyond eating pizza at the event. Staff members essentially gave lightning talks and it was so early in the year that nothing felt like it was immediate or mattered. I quickly forgot everything. This is a consistent mindset we’ve heard from student workers. The thesis process is confusing, it seems like all these rules jump at you last minute, you only learn about the help you could have received after
you've graduated. Staff have been relating this information, but humans learn best when you present resources to them at their point of need, not front loading them to a group of hungry, disinterested college kids.
The zine was our attempt at reaching students at their point of need. One of my colleague’s, Maria Cunningham, had just launched the Reed College Zine collection and zines were on our collective minds. Joe Marquez (the Social Sciences & User Experience Librarian at the time) was our project mastermind, and we collaborated with Annie Downey (the director of research services at the time) and David Gruber (the Director of the Office of Academic Support) to hash out exactly what sort of information should be featured in the zine. After we knew what information was needed, we needed an artist. As a staff/alumni, I knew of a student named Rose Driver that I wanted to reach out to and another staff/alumni was also a fan of Rose’s work, so we reached out with our goals and project plan.
Once we had gotten confirmation from Rose that she could help us with the project, we met once as a large group so Rose could ask questions and we could brainstorm together. We wanted to give Rose as much creative control over the project as possible working with the material that we needed featured. We knew that we wanted a campus map that had a legend to different resources, some workflows about the thesis process, a sort of “Who ya gonna call page,” and an emphasis on not letting the thesis process take over your life for the entire year. Like all good project managers, we SEVERELY underestimated how much time it would take to finish the project. We had assumed it would take around 10 hours on Rose’s end, and it ended up much closer to 30. Whoops. As Rose’s supervisor, I was pretty hands off. We met up only twice, but I sent her notes that I gathered from my own reading and feedback from members of the library staff. Page layout and comic design was all Rose’s creation, she did a great job implementing what we wanted to see without making a text-heavy document. Being able to process the information through both visuals and text allowed for a quick intake of information and would hopefully help students immediately relate the information to the campus.
Despite our bad timing estimates, we were able to have the zine completed before a revamped Senior Sanity event. The zine was our attempt at reaching students at their point of need. They would come to our redone Senior Sanity event and receive flash drives with the Senior Handbook preloaded onto them and a copy of the zine. The goodies were small and innocuous enough that hopefully they’d make their way to the student’s workspace to be forgotten until they were needed. The zine was a prompt to get them to recall what was available to them, to let them know that staff was there to help them through the process and wanted to help them. It did not replace the Senior Handbook, but would give students ideas of the more specific information they might need to track down in the Handbook or ask someone about.
Would I do it again? Absolutely yes! It was a really great experience getting to work with Rose and collaborate with my colleagues on a creative project that had great potential to do good for our community. I’m glad we gave ourselves a good head start on this project and thankfully had the budget to accommodate the time it actually took to complete. Definitely, if we do work like this again, allowing the artist to give us a time estimate rather than trying to figure it out ourselves. This zine was also very focused on campus-wide resources and tried to look at the thesis process in a holistic way. We had to leave out a ton of specific library services such as copyright and citation help as well as coverage of commonly asked questions such as what to do if the resources a student needed wasn’t available. I’d love the chance to create a more library-based zine to help researchers with common confusions that the library is able to help with. Another important skill that got left out of this process was assessment and debriefing. We knew that students were taking the zines from the Senior Sanity event, but having some way to assess if they found the content helpful during the thesis process could help us better understand the effectiveness of this outreach method. That being said, just from working with us, Rose said that she felt much better prepared for the thesis process and learned a lot about what goes into it from working with us, so we got great feedback from at least one senior!
So I’m by no means a ‘zine expert,’ but that’s the cool thing about this format. You don’t need expertise to participate, just ideas you’d like to put out into your library. All the information I’m going to cover in the second half of this presentation is also available in the accompanying zine, please feel free to take some back to your institution. I’ll can also make it available as a PDF if you’d like a digital copy. This diagram represents what I imagine as the creative Zine Lifecycle. Is there only one way to make things? Absolutely not! But this might serve as a good jumping off point for you. Notice that “Get Feedback” brackets all the other steps, I think feedback is incredibly important during the creative process, especially if you are trying to convey information in a more visual format. What makes sense to you visually might read very differently to a different user, so ask people to look at your work often and incorporate their readings into your process.
Start by brainstorming an idea. You can make a Zine for anything and about anything. But since this presentation was ostensibly about meeting information needs, that’s a good place to start. Think about what your institution is currently doing for your patrons, are their areas that could use clarity, are there areas that are sort of “best kept secrets,” things you do for patrons but they only know about them if they know to ask? Getting feedback for this section is a great idea, if you have strong relationships within your community, ask them what aspects of the library they find confusing, or if they think things are missing. A couple ideas I was mulling over when working on presentations were the ideas of a Zine for generic reader’s advisory handouts like a cute little metabook, Zine’s as takeaways for programming and events, if you have infinite patience and way too much cardstock, a Zine done in Braille about assistive technologies you might provide or your audiobooks. Have a zine making session with patrons and have them featured every week! Getting community buy-in seems like a really great starting place because you might also be able to find an enthusiastic partner with a talent for design. If you do outreach to teens and young adults, leading a zine making workshop on Own Stories and Own Voices could be a great way to tap into your patrons creativity. Just make sure if you have someone else do professional artwork, that you pay them, people die of exposure.
Making your dummy, to me, means every stage that exists between the Brainstorm and Finalizing Elements. Nothing during this stage is permanent. Embrace the pencil and eraser lifestyle. I do find it immensely helpful to create what the final format of the zine will look like, I've included 4 different relatively simple zine styles. Create a blank one when you get started that you can draw into directly and also take apart! If you intend to finish the zine on your computer, formatting can get complicated if you have any cuts to make but the dummy can be your formatting guide. I like to make my dummy, denote the cover and then give each page inside a title to get a broad sense of what the zine will cover. Sometimes I will include little doodles, but mostly I'm jotting down the possibilities of the zine. Talk to colleagues to make sure the most important information is going into the zine, it's a small format, so space really matters.
Finalize Elements, how are you actually putting this thing together? If you aren’t an artist, how are you incorporating imagery into your zine? If you flip to the middle of the zine I’ve handed out, you’ll see a list of web addresses. They all link to museums, libraries, and only aggregators that make finding public domain imagery easy, often it’s a toggle within the search. The left web addresses are large and general searches. The right hand page’s web addresses are two art museums, so you would be able to work with paintings and prints largely, the New York Public Library, which has an extensive photography collection among others, and the final link goes to the National Parks Service. I want to point more generally to government resources as a source, most of them are in the public domain, and you don’t have to worry about that pesky year 1924 for anything. It is always good to double check that an image has been cleared before you use it though, or make sure to include a reference list on the back of your zine. If you don’t have access to software or want to work physically, having both all your images and your text cut out will be helpful, then you can play with different layouts before gluing and scanning the finals. Also, have someone proofread all your text elements. I had to redo the zine for this presentation way too many times because I misspelled a word or left out a dash, and it’s relatively text light! I also recommend checking out the links I provided under Design Tools. Coolors.co is a really fun random palette generator that can help elevate the overall visual
appeal of your zine. The Accessibility Resources will help you create documents that can be enjoyed by more people. Webaim has a really great contrast checker and section508 and webaim also are full of best practices when creating things like documents and presentations.
Share your work, put these in a visible location and encourage your patrons to take them! Bring them to faculty desks so students see them during meetings if appropriate. Scatter them around your library! Follow your patrons back to their homes and slip them under their pillows while they sleep! Okay, don’t do that one, maybe try having your reference librarian give them out during consultations instead.
I want to give a big thank you to the many people that supported me and pushed me towards giving my first presentation. This has been a terrifying and educational experience for me! If you're interested in seeing more of Rose's work, I've included a link. I've also linked to more information about the Honor Native Land project and information about Access Statements. So without further ado...
Questions?

Contact me: astewart@reed.edu

Please take zines with you!