

# Club Swem

by Martha Higgins

**I**s your library the most popular place on campus on a Friday night? Would you like it to be? Swem Library at the College of William and Mary is always a popular destination on campus, with a large information commons area, comfortable chairs and couches, lots of group study rooms, and a great “read and relax” area. So how did we manage to become even more popular on a Friday night? We became a dance club, of course! Over 800 students had a great time at the second annual “Club Swem” on a Friday night in February.

In 2009, the library was approached by Alma Mater Productions (AMP), the student-run programming board at William and Mary. They suggested having a dance at Swem, to which we replied, “Huh?” After considering our spaces, the possibilities for outreach, and costs to the library,

and receiving approval from the administration, we said, “Sure?!?” We saw this as an excellent publicity/marketing opportunity, where the students could view the library (and librarians) in a new and dif-

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ferent way. It was a unique use of library space next to the compact shelving of government documents. Where the students normally were hard at work, now they were hard at play.

The first year was a big learning curve for us. We learned about

things like lighting. Even with only the emergency lights on, it was too bright for the “club environment” and the DJ’s light show, so last-minute adjustments were made. AMP had rented a wooden dance floor to make it seem more like a club environment. When the floor was delivered, it was much smaller than we had anticipated, and we had difficulty fitting it around the floor electrical outlets. Other lessons learned? Surprise! Some students may try to sneak out of the designated dance area. With multiple stairwells and elevators, it is important to monitor these. The first year was a success, with over

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900 students attending and a line to get in at times.

The second annual “Club Swem” was held at the end of February 2011, before spring break and the midterm crush. Changes included no dance floor; instead, we rented pipe-and-drape (black) to separate out a dance area. We knew the lighting issues and evaluated all the different lighting options while still working within the fire code. The biggest addition was using a second area of the library as a karaoke space with a second DJ. This was a great hit among the students, though their singing was not always appreciated by some of the more clearheaded attendants. The karaoke songs surprised many of us, with eighties’ tunes being some of the most popular choices. A great rendition of the Village People’s “YMCA” was a huge hit with the crowd.

So what did we at Swem have to do? Not all that much for all of the great publicity and positive feedback we have received. Several staff members and student employees volunteered to help move tables, chairs, study carrels, and display cases out of the dance floor area in the afternoon. We waited until

later in the day so as to disturb as few people as possible. Six staff members volunteered to laugh and have a good time as “chaperones.” Note: Make sure these are fun people! We asked dining ser-

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vices to donate some food items, which they graciously provided, and made a phone call to Red Bull to have them stop by with some refreshments.

The student group paid for the rentals, DJs, food and drinks (in addition to what dining services had donated), security guards, glow sticks, wristbands, and an additional housekeeper for the morning clean-up. The total expense for the dance was \$1,400. According to AMP, “little cost for such an effective event!” With only one poster on campus and a Facebook page to advertise the event, it was very

well attended and appreciated by the students, who shook their booties until one in the morning.

Swem Library is often asked to have various events held in the building—from women’s forum events to scavenger hunts to our first wedding (two staff members). After the dances, we have been approached by more sororities and fraternities for events and by other student groups on campus. With all the discussions going on about e-resources, and the library as place, this may be something to consider in the future. We have also expanded our areas for art displays, which seem to be popular among students. “Club Swem” may be one of the many reasons that Swem Library is one of the more popular campus libraries in the country.<sup>1</sup> The dance is now mentioned on the campus tours when they come into the library. Parents look around thinking, “This isn’t like MY old college library!”

#### Notes

1. Robert Franek and others, *The Princeton Review: The Best 373 Colleges*, 2011 ed. (New York: Random House, 2011). **vi**