Transcript

(Intro music)

Angela: Welcome to the Digital Creator Podcast, the show where we spotlight students working on cool digital projects and more! I'm Angela, a consultant at the Digital Knowledge Center, where we empower students to be digital creators. Today's guest, Cat, led a collaborative embroidery workshop with the DKC and Yarnworks, teaching participants both digital design using the Ember software and hands-on embroidery techniques.

Cat: Hi, I am Cat Williams. I use she/They pronouns. I am an environmental science major and a biology minor, and I am actually a senior this year, so I will graduate in the spring of 2026.

Angela: That's awesome. Thank you for being here, Cat. So can you just go ahead and talk about the workshop that you did with the DKC and what a workshop is?

Cat: Yeah, of course. So, I am also the president of Yarnworks, which is our local knitters, and we do stuff like embroidery and crochet and yarn and everything that involves thread or yarn. So we hosted our embroidery workshop a few days ago, and it was a ton of fun. So during our workshop, we had two elements. We had an element that was geared towards more the DKC, and that was using an online embroidery like making kind of website called Ember. And you could actually take those designs that you make online and put them into the embroidery machine that you guys have. And you can embroider that way. But we also taught some hand embroidery as well. So it was, I guess a workshop is just a place where you can learn a new skill. Whether, you know, it is using digital tools or, we also did it, with our hands as well. And that was just a ton of fun so yeah.

Angela: Awesome. And so I'm sure with Yarnworks, like with your club members, you often like teach each other things. So what's like why did you specifically choose to work with the DKC? Did they reach out to you? How did that work?

Cat: Yeah, so earlier this semester, we actually had another workshop, which is our sewing workshop. And that was actually a joint workshop with the DKC, Yarnworks, and also UMW Cosplay Club. And we were discussing what we wanted to do with the sewing workshop. I brought up that we want to do an embroidery workshop just in general, not necessarily with the DKC, where people could come and learn embroidery. And Russul actually reached out and was like, hey, is that something that you guys want to, you know, maybe want to partner on? We do have an embroidery machine. And I was like, Yeah, that sounds great. So we went from there and we set a date and planned everything out and it went great.

Angela: Awesome. So, can you talk about the planning process, working with Russul, who's the head of our workshop committee, how that all worked, and the timeline?

Cat: Yeah, so we had our first meeting for the workshop about two weeks beforehand. And during that meeting, we first went over what we wanted to do at the workshop. So we knew that we wanted to do embroidery. However, we wanted to incorporate in a digital element of embroidery, and it took us a minute to find out what that would be. So with the embroidery machine that you guys have, it does take a while. So we kind of realized since there's only one and we might have up to 15 participants, it probably didn't make sense to have each person embroider something on the machine. So what we decided to do instead is we decided to break it up into two parts. And we did talk about this, and we got approval from everyone else as well. So one of the first things we did is, again, we talked about what we wanted to do, and we decided that we wanted it to be two parts. A part where you do design something online, and then a part where it's more hands-on. So that way people can have something that they can take home, and hopefully it would pique some interest in the craft. So Yarnworks as a whole is a very hands-on club because we are doing crafts. It's a craft club. So that made sense for us. So afterwards, we went over what we would need and what, the time that worked best for both of us and we also went over who would be there to help run everything. So of course it was myself and then I had two of my officers join and then we also had a DKC consultant as well join in and they were a great help. So we always love working with Jasper. And it went pretty smoothly because we also used the workshop classroom and everything, and everything was ordered on time. And we actually did a rehearsal beforehand, about a few days beforehand. And that was also good. So I basically walked through the PowerPoint that I had, and we made edits to the PowerPoint based on what they've seen that's worked in the past. And then we also went through, the software and what I would be showing people online and also hands-on. So it was just, it was a good run-through and it also helped me catch some, maybe some spelling mistakes in my PowerPoint as well. So it ended up working out really great. So they were really, really awesome throughout the entire process.

Angela: Awesome. And can you talk about that, like, piece of technology that you used to help design the embroidery. Had you used that before this workshop and how'd you find out about it?

Cat: So this is actually completely new to me.

Angela: So what's it called again?

Cat: It's called Ember. So Ember is a website and you can actually use it on your phone or your computer where you basically can draw shapes. You could do text and you basically design something online and then you can download it to your computer and then upload it to the

machine. So it gives you a lot more freedom with what shapes you would like to make and also what designs you want to make because embroidery can be a very complicated thing. So sometimes, especially if you're doing big projects, this is a really helpful tool to do that. Of course, I knew I'm also completely new to the embroidery machine and everything. So it took me a minute to learn the software, but it's incredibly intuitive and really user-friendly. So I was able to learn it pretty quickly. And then during the workshop, I just gave everyone a rundown of what everything did. And then we had about, like it was like around like 10 to 15 minutes where people could create a design of their own. and then download it to their computers so they could get some training from you guys and hopefully get it embroidered.

Angela: Perfect. Yeah, I find like sometimes when you just learn something, it kind of helps with teaching people since you had to figure out yourself.

Cat: Yep, it's fresh.

Angela: How many people attended the workshop?

Cat: So our attendance was about 12-ish people, which is great because we did, we put the cap at 15, but we did want around 12. Just because it went really smoothly because I find that embroidery is something that is as complicated as you would like it to be. So, you know, we picked out some designs for people to use and I had a handout that had a bunch of different stitches that people could try and people were trying all of the stitches and some more complicated ones as they were getting used to it. And it was, yeah, so we had about around 11 to 12 people that did show up and they, and it was a lot of fun.

Angela: Yeah, that's a good turnout. Had they embroidered before, do you know their level of experience?

Cat: So it was really, some of them had before, or dabbled at another time and then came back to it. And then we also did have people who had never done it before. So it was a lot of people. A lot of people were slow and steady and a lot of people didn't finish. But what was really cool about this workshop is that we could actually give the materials to take home and continue what they were doing. And embroidery is one of those things where it's practice. You practice and you practice and you find something that works for you and something that works best for you in the design that you're working with. And then you can go with that. So it was, I did teach a lot of people how to use the software though, but when it comes to just embroidery, the practice itself, we did have some people who were a little bit more familiar than others, but overall it was definitely beginners. We didn't have any like experts show up.

Angela: It's hard to kind of like address when people have different levels of expertise. So I'm sure it helped like that there were at least four of you, right, who were like helping.

Cat: Yeah, so really funny, almost all of us are also beginners. So, but like I said, it's as complicated as you want to make it. So, and the handout that I gave out had diagrams and it was, I had diagrams all over the PowerPoint. So it was we could give people a jumping off point. Basically, that was the goal. And this is, it really, this is the kind of thing where you don't have to be an expert to produce something. So where like with crochet and knitting, it's a little bit different because you have to get the basics down, but the basics of this is literally putting a needle through fabric. So I think most people can do that, but it's, you know, it comes down to how straight your line is and, you know, stuff like that. And that's just practice. So I feel like a lot of people did walk out of that with a maybe a feeling that they could continue and get better.

Angela: So now that your workshop is over, would you say it was a success?

Cat: I would say it was a success. A lot of people had a lot of fun and we had most other people stay until the entire thing and some people created some beautiful, beautiful things. So I think it was very successful and I'm very excited to hopefully see some new faces at Yarnworks and it actually made I know for sure it made one of my officers want to give it a more in-depth try. And I also am a little bit maybe excited to jump into this too. So it's exciting because I feel like embroidery doesn't get enough love.

Angela: Yeah, how long was the workshop? Was it 2 hours?

Cat: It was, it was 2 hours because I feel like you can't really, it's one of those things where it's at your own pace. And I feel like most people couldn't produce something that they're happy with in only an hour, especially when that whole hour is not just hand embroidery. So we had some nice music playing and everyone just did their own thing and they let us know if they needed help. And I think that it was a very relaxing environment for a lot of people.

Angela: Gotcha, that's really nice. Can you give some examples of what people made specifically?

Cat: Yeah, so a lot of the patterns that we had were plant related. So, we definitely had some flowers. I made some flowers myself and someone made a cactus, which I think was really, really cute. Some people actually freehanded their design instead of using one of our pre-made ones. So we had someone do a moth and it was beautiful. They didn't finish it, but it was stunning nonetheless. And then we also had some people doing like moons and stuff like that, which is, it's a fairly simple design. So it was really cool. A lot of people didn't do it directly on their clothing because they were beginners. So they actually used a piece of scrap fabric as practice, which I think if you're starting out having something that's not, not having a piece of clothing that you actually like to practice on is worth doing because your stitches are not going to be perfect at the start. And that's just how it is with anything that you learn how to do for the first time. So yeah.

Angela: And I know you mentioned this when you were preparing, you had to like ask the DKC to order specific materials. So what type of materials are needed for embroidery?

Cat: So the first big thing is embroidery hoops. So because we were doing really small designs, we did order some smaller ones. Yarnworks, we have embroidery hoops, but we have a variety pack. So we have some that are massive for no reason. And that just doesn't really make any sense for a beginner's workshop. We also wanted people to be able to take these if they wanted to. So yeah, we ordered some that were, you know, just in bulk, some small ones, you know, that people could take home with them and it wouldn't be like a burden to carry. Yarnworks already has plenty of embroidery thread and needles, so we actually just used our supplies for that. And people were allowed to take home thread because we have an abundance of it. And we asked them to keep the needles with us. And other than that, we just had to order the patterns themselves. So they are on water-soluble paper. Meaning that once you are done stitching, all you have to do is run the fabric under some water and you are left with your design and there's no paper or anything left.

Angela: That's really cool. And you're the president of Yarnworks?

Cat: I am, yes.

Angela: Okay, so when did you join the club and get into like sewing, crocheting, embroidery?

Cat: Yeah, so I'm actually a transfer. So I transferred last year in 2024 to UMW, and I joined Yarnworks pretty much as soon as I could. So I started knitting maybe when I was 13, but I actually learned how to crochet at Yarnworks when I first joined, and that was one of the first things I did. I've been sewing for a while, and I recently just picked up embroidery because of this workshop, and it was a ton of fun. So I became president this semester, and we did a bit of a club revamp, and I'm really happy with what we've done with it so far, and I'm really excited to see what we can do next semester, and I'm excited to see what my officers carry on doing after, you know, I do graduate.

Angela: Yeah. And do you have any other workshop plans, you think, for the future?

Cat: So for the future, I know that every year we do have a sewing workshop with the UMW Cosplay Club, and I do really want that to continue. And then I would like to continue this embroidery workshop every year as well. We do have some of our, they're not necessarily, we've had a couple workshops this semester, but they weren't necessarily with the DKC. We have some crochet workshops. So we had pumpkins earlier around October, and we do have a polar bear crochet workshop coming up in December. And we actually have another one tomorrow, and that is our patchwork workshop, where we're going to be sewing patches on to clothes, and that is a collaboration with Echo Trends. So yeah. Lots of fun, lots of collabs this

semester. So I know next semester we're hoping to do something with the Tea club that just got started here. So yeah.

Angela: Lots going on. So for other clubs who are interested in doing a workshop with the DKC, would you recommend doing it? What have been the benefits for you?

Cat: So I think that the main benefit is that you – part of the reason that I like to do so many events is because it keeps people engaged with your club. So, a club is nothing without its members. So it draws people in that maybe, were skeptical about it before and, it retains members. So, and it's fun. That's the point of all of this is that it's fun. I had fun. They had fun. And that's all that matters. That's my job as a president is to let people have fun and express themselves. And it also taught everyone some new skills, which I think is super cool. And the DKC made everything a lot easier because we didn't have to handle advertising, which is very nice. And they also took on some of the costs, which was also very nice. And just the organization of all of it. So yeah, it was awesome. And they streamline the process, I think, because when we run our own workshops, it's a little bit more chaotic because it's, just us and most of the time it is a crochet workshop. So yeah, it was easier on, with it being two people, but of course it is, but it, in the end, let me be able to do something really fun for people and for people not to feel as nervous because it's not just a club meeting. It's somewhere in a different location where you get to learn with people who aren't necessarily club members. So it makes it more mainstream, I guess, if that makes sense.

Angela: I see that because it's open to everyone. Like you can just sign up, you don't know.

Cat: Exactly. I feel like a lot of people with our other workshops think it's like for club members only, but it's actually the exact opposite. We want people to have fun and learn and be able to express themselves through their craft because that's what all this is all about. And I'm glad I got to do that and help other people do that.

Angela: Yeah, and now we're going to have our embroidery machines up for reservation. So if students are interested, they can do that. And then do you want to share about like where people can follow your club and everything?

Cat: Yes, absolutely. So we are UMW Yarnworks. We normally just go by Yarnworks. You can find us on Instagram. I believe it is UMW underscore Yarnworks on Instagram. And we do have a link tree there where you can join things like our Discord and our email mailing list. And we also have the RSVPs for some upcoming events as well on there. So you can keep in touch. And I do always send out emails for big events. And our Discord is the best place to just stay in touch with everything. So yeah.

Angela: All right. Well, thank you. Join Yarnworks.

Cat: Yep. We have a lot of fun. So yeah, we'd love to see even more people be able to have join in the fun.

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Angela: This has been the Digital Creator Podcast. You can find a transcript of our conversation and more about this workshop below. This podcast was produced by me, Angela Payne, with help from Ally Hamilton and the resources at the Digital Knowledge Center. Are you interested in becoming a digital creator? Do you have a cool project or workshop you want to share? Go to dkc.umw.edu for information on how to get started. Thank you for listening.

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