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Changing Our Aim: Infiltrating Faculty with Information Literacy

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Changing Our Aim: Infiltrating Faculty with Information Literacy

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Abstract

Librarians are stretched thin these days – budget cuts and decreasing numbers are forcing us to look at new ways of doing things. While the embedded information literacy model has gained popularity in the past number of years, it may be time for a new model of information literacy. We must arm teaching faculty with the tools they need to teach information literacy to their students. Ideas and examples of how academic librarians can weave information literacy into the teaching culture on campus, and provide instruction to faculty members on how to teach research and information skills to their classes, are explored. By meeting faculty members in their usual ‘learning spheres’ we can show them a more holistic perspective on information literacy and give them examples of how libraries can help them in their own teaching and research, thus encouraging them to transfer some of that knowledge to their students.

Keywords: information literacy; faculty engagement; academic libraries; faculty/librarian collaboration

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Changing Our Aim: Infiltrating Faculty with Information Literacy

Introduction

[B]eing able to find, judge, and use information is a fundamental intellectual skill that all of our students need, and the responsibility for improving their abilities is not on librarians' shoulders alone; it's a job for the entire campus, and offers benefits to all faculty. (Fister, 2009, p. 4)

At this time of economic austerity in libraries, we librarians involved with instruction must change our aim with information literacy, and shift our primary focus from students to faculty. This "teach the teachers" model, which puts the instruction of information literacy (IL) in the hands of those who actually teach classes, may seem like a radical idea; it certainly runs counter to what most librarians have internalized from our graduate studies and professional lives. The prevailing notion is that we should strive to become as embedded in the classrooms as possible as the primary, if not the only, teachers of IL in any educational institution. As it turns out, others are starting to change their thinking about IL instruction as well; in fact, there seems to be a significant shift underway right now.

Most libraries are not staffed with enough librarians to truly embed themselves in all classes, and many of us do not have the institutional support to integrate IL across the curriculum. As a result, we end up doing a spotty, piecemeal job, reaching some students multiple times and others not at all. This is inefficient and ineffective. But what if we teach the faculty who teach the students? Faculty have more influence over students' learning and have developed a relationship with them; students are much more likely to listen to an information literacy message if it comes from the professor that they know and trust, and who has control over their final grade. In addition, it may help faculty become better researchers and library users.

Information literacy is too big a topic for librarians to teach alone. Only nine out of the 87 IL outcomes listed in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)'s [*Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians*](#) (2001) were noted to be mainly the responsibility for librarians to teach (Gullikson, 2006, p. 590), but Gullikson's research shows that faculty deem most of the outcomes to be very important (p. 588). The new ACRL [*Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*](#) (2015) expands IL into an even bigger, broader, and more integrated concept. At our

institution, we changed our focus; in our view, the advent of the *Framework* provides an opportunity to educate faculty, as it seems like a structure in which they can envision their own place in as teachers and researchers. By equipping faculty with the tools to teach information literacy, we will reach more students. This article outlines the background and development of this idea, and identifies strategies used at the University of Lethbridge and other academic libraries to move in this direction. It further describes some responses to these efforts, and strategizes the idea as a four-pronged approach: communicate, encourage, educate and infiltrate.

The University of Lethbridge (U of L) Library is like most academic libraries, with decreasing numbers of librarians and stable or increasing numbers of users. In the past five years, we have been reduced from eleven to seven librarians who have reference, subject liaison, and teaching responsibilities. Still, our student numbers have remained constant with enrolment at about 8,200. This equates to one librarian for every 1,200 students—an unrealistic teaching goal. In fact, the U of L librarians reach less than 25% of possible students. We concluded it may be more sensible to teach the 478 teaching faculty—a ratio of 1:17—who have considerably more contact with and influence over students.

We recognized that faculty may not fully realize the need for IL instruction; they may not have the time to deal with it; they may be resistant to learning from librarians; and/or they may not be as interested in teaching IL concepts. Therefore, our goal was to surreptitiously train faculty with the intention that they will be better prepared to transfer IL skills to their students; we envisioned a “train-the-trainer” approach to IL instruction.

Literature Review

The idea we propose is not new. Risë Smith from Dakota State University published an ACRL White Paper entitled *Philosophical Shift: Teach the Faculty to Teach Information Literacy* (1997). She was one of the first to strongly advocate for shifting IL instruction primarily to faculty. Smith makes some good points, including that faculty are a smaller, more manageable market for librarian IL instructional efforts; that faculty have more influence over the students and control over the learning environment; that only when faculty are on board will IL actually reach all students; and that faculty are in the best position to draw the connections between IL and disciplinary research methodologies and epistemologies: “[F]aculty control the learning environment and are in a better position than library faculty to create situations which allow students to see information seeking as an essential part of

problem-solving in a discipline” (Smith, 1997). Smith’s article reflected what we had already been thinking:

When faculty become the target of information literacy, we can concentrate on this smaller market for our instructional efforts. Furthermore, faculty are the critical market for reaching our goal of student information literacy. Information literacy will be integrated throughout the curriculum only if faculty recognize its importance, make it a goal as they develop their syllabi, and know how to teach information literacy themselves. (Smith, 1997)

Her article, and others that followed, resonated with the authors as we tried to manage our liaison work and other library responsibilities. We spread ourselves thinly between the diverse tasks of a liaison librarian; reference work; one-on-one research consultations with students and faculty; developing and managing our collections; developing programs to do with scholarly communications and other topics; communications and relationship building with our departments and faculties; library and institutional committee work; and teaching. The students themselves will likely be more receptive and take more seriously the need to learn about this “library stuff” if their “real” instructor is delivering that message. Having faculty teach these concepts to students will help integrate information literacy across the curriculum—something that librarians, no matter how hard we try, are often unable to accomplish. At the University of Lethbridge, we have an additional incentive to do this. The University is currently undergoing a revitalization of its Liberal Education program, which encompasses many kinds of literacies and skills across disciplines. Information literacy is an integral part of this program.

An article by Gloria Leckie (1996), talks about the ineffectiveness of one-shot sessions and how faculty should include information literacy skills in a more integrated way, within the context of their classes (p. 206). She asserted part of the problem is that faculty do not understand how students conceive of research, as the students’ research model is very different from that of the faculty. If faculty better understand what students know, and how they seek and use information, they will be better positioned to design assignments that more effectively engage students, and they will not have such unrealistic expectations of student capabilities (Leckie, 1996, p. 202). A librarian can support this effort by providing suggestions, coming in for a guest lecture, or providing faculty training, but the responsibility lies with the faculty members to deliver the core IL message throughout the course (Leckie, 1996, p. 207). Exner also noted the disconnect between faculty and students

when it comes to the research process: “[T]here are fundamental differences between the processes of inquiry used by original researchers as compared to students... who are synthesizing information to find answers” (2014, p. 460).

Boon, Johnson, and Webber (2007) compared English faculty perceptions of information literacy to various international standards, including the ACRL’s *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2015) in the United States; the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL)’s *Seven Pillars of Information Literacy* (2011) in the United Kingdom; and the *Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework* (Bundy, 2014). Boon, Johnson, and Webber (2007) discovered a disconnect between students and faculty members’ scholarly research, and they felt that “increasing English academics’ awareness of information literacy as something that they already do as scholarly researchers and educators, and as something they can more explicitly convey to their students” would lead to fuller integration of IL skills into the curriculum (p. 225). As “front-line educators,” these authors believed faculty were “potentially vital agents for information literacy” (p. 205).

In 2014, Cope and Sanabria analyzed 20 interviews with faculty regarding their conceptions of information literacy, how it differs between disciplines, and how it differs from librarians’ views (p. 475). They found that the disciplinary differences were not significant; the key difference between faculty and librarians was that “faculty view information literacy as firmly embedded in their disciplines and general education coursework... they believe they already incorporate IL work in their courses” (p. 498). This study also found that disciplinary faculty conceive of information literacy as a general skill along with other literacies (p. 497). If this is true, then our surreptitious “IL message” intended to improve faculty information literacy skills will be passed to their students, knowingly or not. Ideally, it will flow into the rest of their courses in a seamless, embedded manner.

Gullikson (2006) found that faculty think information literacy skills are important, but that there is little agreement on which skills are most necessary, or how students should be acquiring these skills (p. 588). The *Colorado Academic Library Impact Study* showed that faculty expected students to seek out help from a librarian, while students were rarely asking librarians for help (Dickenson, 2006, p. vii). As a result, students were lost in the middle, not knowing where to turn for assistance, or turning to less-informed sources (such as friends, family, and Google searches) for help. If faculty were to make their desire that students seek

assistance from a librarian more explicit, perhaps more students would make use of reference services available to them.

Sophie Bury from York University studied faculty attitudes and perceptions of IL across disciplines (2011), and Kristina Nilson from Thompson Rivers University researched faculty perceptions of librarian-led IL sessions (2012). The results of these studies showed that faculty believe IL is important, and they perceive students to be lacking in those skills. Although the lack of IL skills is recognized as a problem, there seems to be a reluctance to devote class time to what is perceived to be skills-based instruction. However, the evidence from both Bury and Nilson is encouraging in showing that faculty are aware of IL as an important skill set in students. Morrison (2007) conducted another study showing faculty awareness of the need for IL, and their perception that students often lack those skills. Morrison found that some faculty taught IL in their classes, which led her to the conclusion that “[t]he awareness of pedagogical practices to improve student learning presented by the participants of this study may represent a cultural shift among faculty with a greater focus on their roles as educators” (p. 16).

In 2004, Hannelore Rader echoed the need for librarians to “teach the teachers” in order for faculty to become more information literate (p. 76). She also highlighted the need for librarians to market themselves as information experts in order to gain the respect of faculty as peers. McGuinness (2006) reinforced this notion when she proposed various ways to promote information literacy; these include publishing in educational journals, presenting at conferences in non-library fields, and organizing discipline-specific faculty workshops (which would be included on institutional lists of PD opportunities).

Librarians at Northwest Vista College embarked on an outreach campaign, including a series of informal workshops for faculty (Reeves, Nishimuta, McMillan, & Godin, 2003). As librarians know, however, it’s not easy to attract faculty to these sessions. Marjorie White (2003) outlined the reasons why faculty may be resistant to attending library-led workshops, and the ways we can overcome that resistance. Reasons included faculty members not wanting to reveal their own ignorance or having an inflated sense of their own capabilities; not wanting to be taught by a peer or, even worse, a librarian; resisting the position of a student by giving up control of the classroom; no external motivation for gaining skills (such as promotion and tenure); and lack of time (p. 327). White offered several solutions to try to combat these issues, highlighted by having the faculty members feel more engaged in the creation of the class in terms of content, participatory learning exercises, and discipline-

specificity. Faculty need convincing that their attendance at these workshops will strengthen their own research skills and save time, improve their students' coursework, and improve their overall teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, institutional support that values information literacy would help legitimize workshop attendance as a good way to spend professional development time (White, 2003).

This "teach the teachers" model is being practiced in some universities and colleges. In 2015, Alexander Watkins and Katherine Morrison from the University of Colorado Boulder presented on and wrote an article about their project to train graduate students to teach discipline-specific information literacy. Graduate students are an ideal target for this model because they are eager to improve their own research skills, and because they represent the next generation of faculty members who could carry on this practice of teaching students IL skills. Another example comes from Vance and York (2014), who described their "à la carte" method of "self-serve library instruction tools to enable faculty to teach information literacy without a librarian" (p. 165). They created presentation slides, handouts, and worksheets, and repurposed a LibGuide and instructional videos for faculty to help themselves, tools which received high usage.

What we've been doing at the University of Lethbridge

Recruiting faculty to teach information literacy is not something we officially do at the U of L; however, we have started the planning process. We publicize and promote resources to faculty on a regular basis through faculty newsletters, a monthly *Resource Radar* blog, a copyright column in the faculty association newsletter, and other social media. The Library has held workshops for faculty and graduate students on topics such as bibliographic management software, copyright, and resources from our local Centre for Oral History and Tradition. Future sessions will include scholarly communication, data management, altmetrics, and discipline-specific resources and database training. We reach many graduate students through workshops organized on a departmental basis, participation in the School of Graduate Studies' Thesis Writing Bootcamp, and a graduate course in IL for the Faculty of Fine Arts, and we plan to focus our efforts in this area by standardizing desired outcomes.

The Teaching Centre on our campus has a mission "[t]o promote and enhance outstanding and inspirational teaching in a vital and engaging learning environment" (2016). To this end, they offer workshops and events which are well-attended and respected by faculty and

graduate students. In the next academic year, we will partner with the Teaching Centre to offer an information literacy session in their *Talking about Teaching* afternoons; we will discuss IL more holistically, rather than simply the mechanics of finding information. We have started building this relationship by presenting to teaching faculty at our annual campus Teaching Symposium, also organized by the Teaching Centre. Our session focused on the new [*Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*](#) (ACRL, 2015) and how it can be integrated within our recently revised objectives for a Liberal Education model for undergraduate education (Cowan & Eva, University of Lethbridge, 2015); this was enthusiastically received. We also published an article in the Teaching Centre's magazine on the importance of information literacy to the U of L's Liberal Education strategy (Eva & Cowan, 2015).

Our team created a U of L Library tab in our university's course management system, Moodle. We have delivered IL sessions via webinar to satellite campuses. We also integrated IL sessions for the local and distance sections of Academic Writing courses, including a suite of modules in Moodle. These modules provide Academic Writing professors a way to integrate IL into their class with librarian-created teaching resources and exercises. We would like to carry this idea further and create an online information literacy toolkit, as described by Vance and York (2014) and demonstrated by librarians at the University of British Columbia in their online *Faculty Information Literacy Toolkit* (2015): a web-based toolkit containing resources to support faculty in assignment creation and information literacy instruction.

The authors are a part of New Faculty Orientation, meeting with new hires to ensure they know their liaison librarian and are familiar with library services and resources, including information literacy. A renewed focus on introducing the concept of information literacy into casual conversations and social situations is also paramount. Furthermore, we believe that increasing our own academic standing is a critical part of building our professional reputation, and to this end we plan to target non-LIS conferences and publications for our output on information literacy topics. Targeting the disciplines for which we liaise increases our visibility among targeted faculty. As an example of this, one of the authors presented with a Liberal Education faculty member at the Threshold Concepts Conference, and another of the authors presented for museum professionals at the Alberta Museums Association conference.

Responses so far...

As noted, we presented on the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015) and its natural integration within Liberal Education to faculty members at our annual Teaching Symposium. We asked attendees whether they already integrate information literacy into their courses, and what skills and resources they might need before feeling comfortable enough to do so. Responses ranged from those already integrating IL skills into their classes, to those who have invited librarians in for one-shot sessions, to those who have never considered the idea of IL being a necessary course component. Many faculty members expressed concerns about getting students to understand the importance of source evaluation, and enabling them to transfer skills learned in class to the actual research process. Faculty were receptive to our message and wanted to work together to improve their students' skills. A few attendees shared what they are already doing to improve students' IL skills; strategies included using style guides to explain the rhetorical conventions of their discipline, and identifying the leading scholars and authoritative reference works in their area. Everyone agreed that information literacy skills are context-dependent; it was suggested that there should be discussions within departments regarding the standardization of information literacy practices for each discipline. Some of the areas in which faculty reported they needed assistance included using digital research and citation tools, identifying the validity of materials, and instructing students about plagiarism.

Our presentation generated a productive discussion and enthusiastic response from those in attendance. We believe it resulted in a renewed interest in students' information literacy skills, and instructors appeared more willing to be a part of that process. We also had a positive response from the Teaching Centre staff; this was important, as they directly support faculty in their classroom and online teaching, and they are well-respected by faculty as advisors. Their potential recommendation to instructors to include information literacy components in their classes would further our cause.

Communicate, Encourage, Educate, and Infiltrate

Of all the ideas that we read about, considered, borrowed, and implemented, four main themes emerged. Our strategy for involving faculty in IL instruction evolved into a four-pronged approach: communicate, encourage, educate, and infiltrate.

Communicate includes the continual promotion, outreach, writing, talking, e-mailing, and social media engagement that most liaison librarians are already engaged in, with a focus on the idea of information literacy. This can range from letting people know about library resources they may not be aware of, to starting conversations about the value of IL in the academic world. Additionally, if we can encourage institutional communication through something like an information literacy plan for the university, all the better.

Communication is one key piece in raising awareness among teaching faculty and university administration about the importance of IL. Examples might include creating a website or LibGuide devoted to IL; discussing and promoting IL through faculty newsletters, university publications, or social media; and social communication through meetings and informal social events.

Encourage is about advocacy. As Susanna Cowan (2014) points out, institutional authority is usually held outside of the library. While this means we may be limited in our ability to directly affect change, we can encourage those with greater institutional authority, such as faculty and administration, to understand and acknowledge the importance of IL. There are many ways to go about this task, including meeting with new faculty to discuss IL and how they can incorporate it into their classes; talking about IL at faculty council meetings, curriculum coordinating, or redevelopment committees; or developing an institutional IL plan to present to university administration, as librarians at York University have done (*Information Literacy Plan 2010-2015*). As the success story at Smith College demonstrated (Sajdak, 2012), the goal of integrating IL into the curriculum might be easier accomplished at the departmental level, so articulating and advocating for it with departmental liaisons may help plant the seed.

Educate—There are many avenues to educating faculty members, both formally and informally, including workshops, brown bag sessions, creating resources for self-directed learning opportunities (e.g., online modules, exercises, IL toolkits, and how-to guides), and summer programs. It is important to create a range of educational opportunities, from resource-based training sessions to theoretical colloquia around the topic of IL. The idea is to bring IL theory out of the library, where it has increasingly been isolated from subject-specific research methodologies, and reintegrate it within the teaching of scholars and faculty who are doing research within their disciplines. As Grafstein (2002) points out, IL as a field has become isolated from different disciplines' epistemologies and research paradigms. While we have given a lot of thought to faculty development and workshops,

perhaps an even more important constituency is graduate students. If we can help educate them about IL and how to include it in their teaching as TAs and as future faculty members through professional training workshops, courses, and so on, there might be a shift over the next generation.

Infiltrate—Given that the library is rarely the seat of institutional authority (Cowan, 2014), we find ourselves almost surreptitiously sneaking the topic of IL in wherever we can. By “infiltrate,” we really mean to take advantage of what already exists, and to use existing structures and organizations to advance IL. We can use existing communications that faculty access, whether journals, newsletters, conferences, or social media, to bring the IL discussion into their regular spheres of communication and learning. By identifying the existing committees, projects, centers, or other organizations that already have working relationships with faculty (and where IL is a logical fit), we can leverage these venues to help promote IL among faculty. By working within existing structures, and with stakeholders such as the U of L Teaching Centre (and its established Talking About Teaching sessions), the Office of Research and Innovation Services, the Liberal Education Revitalization Team, or the Academic Writing Programme, we have something of a captive audience of engaged faculty members. We can also take advantage of new pedagogy or new technology to include IL into the conversation at the university. By presenting on IL topics at discipline-specific conferences, where our audience will be teaching faculty and graduate students rather than librarians, and publishing on IL in discipline-specific journals, we will help educate a wider audience than librarians. Finally, returning to the graduate students, one of the most effective ways of making a change might be to work with the School of Graduate Studies to develop a standard IL instruction training program that is required as part of their professional training.

Conclusion

The best way to integrate IL into faculty thinking and teaching is by using a multi-faceted approach and by meeting the faculty on their own turf. This approach includes taking advantage of existing infrastructure upon which the faculty already rely, and working with groups who already have a close working relationship with teaching faculty. Secondly, we recognize the importance of focusing on future faculty: graduate students. If we ensure graduate students have an understanding of IL skills and pedagogy, they are more likely to include it into their teaching. IL needs to be an institution-wide priority for it to succeed,

with support from both university administration and faculty, and the involvement of the entire teaching community:

Information literacy is alive and well. And should be. But perhaps not by that name, and perhaps not in the hands--at least not mostly in the hands--of librarians. Information literacy must, like so many other library services, enter the educational commons, in the sense of a collaborative network of pedagogies and practices that crosses internal and external institutional boundaries and has no 'home' because it lives in no one place. (Cowan, 2014, p. 30)

With persistence and everything from small, concrete efforts (like publicizing resources in faculty newsletters) to larger, more theoretical efforts (like leading a multidisciplinary discussion on IL and its importance at the campus teaching day), we can weave information literacy into the existing teaching culture on campus. This will raise the level of information literacy skills and awareness among faculty in general, who will pass these skills on to their students. To make the transition from collecting information to creating knowledge, IL must be contextualized within disciplinary cultures of practice and knowledge, and who better to accomplish this than the faculty who have devoted their careers to research and teaching in their discipline.

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