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## Teaching Matters: Reshaping the Role of Information Literacy Instructional Services

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# RESHAPING THE ROLE OF INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES

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This column focuses on the conceptual and practical aspects of teaching information literacy. Column co-editors Patrick Ragains and Janelle Zauha write about trends and issues that have come to our attention, but also solicit contributions to this space. Readers with ideas for Teaching Matters may contact Patrick Ragains at [ragains@unr.edu](mailto:ragains@unr.edu), or the editors of Communications in Information Literacy at [editors@comminfolit.org](mailto:editors@comminfolit.org).

Over the past year I have noticed accelerating change in academic libraries (in other words, I have been paying attention). Change is undeniably affecting library collections and services. Collections budgets have been stretched to new limits, stimulating more journal cancellations and drastic reductions in book purchases. Many libraries continue to record declining traffic at their reference desks, while at the same time, numbers of group instruction sessions, office consultations and numbers of online questions are increasing. Since our user populations are relatively stable (that is, when compared to budgets and technological change, both of which are very changeable), librarians who understand their users can make informed decisions and adopt service models designed to meet their needs and preferences, including patron-driven acquisition and innovative instruction techniques.

Services ideally stem from a library's mission, which is another relative constant. Librarians need to identify their service mission and ask how information literacy instruction (ILI) fits into it. Predominant and long-established service *models*, such as one-shot visits to courses, do not define a service *mission*. Since we know that providing in-person instruction sessions is difficult, if not impossible, to scale up to reach an entire student population, the one-shot is insufficient to meet the service mission of a university library. Below, I will briefly discuss some ILI models that have emerged in recent years, as librarians attempt to reach more students.

### *Embedding instructional guides and library services into online courses*

This effort was pioneered at Duke University. (Daly, 2010) Many subject and course-related library web pages are infrequently used, so linking to appropriate

library guides from online courses is intended to increase their use by students. Librarians at my university worked with our instructional design team to link Springshare Campus Guides to each online course on the university's Blackboard platform. In the first semester after implementing this, the Campus Guides were used from 17% of the online courses – a modest but notable beginning. Other libraries, including the University of Arizona, have done similar projects. (Brewer, 2012)

### *Working with faculty to redesign courses*

Library-sponsored course redesign has been successful at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Phoenix College. (Zald and Hoover, 2012; Van Hoeck, Roselle, and Palmer, 2012) At both institutions, faculty received incentives to attend course redesign workshops, during which librarians and faculty examined and revised course objectives, then developed course activities promoting information literacy competencies. Such an effort requires faculty receptiveness and effective preparation of librarians to work with faculty in this capacity, including the integration of instructional design into librarians' skill set.

### *Embedded instruction*

Although embedded ILI became widely known after Susan Sharpless Smith's research trip with a sociology course (ALA, 2008), that label has been applied to several different types of involvement. For example, librarians may have multiple in-person meetings with classes, design and grade selected course assignments, or participate in online instruction via online meetings, chat and bulletin boards. Although it may be relatively easy to initiate an embedded role, librarians doing so must

commit to the time required to attend more class meetings, or to consult with students outside of class.

These trends in ILI stand to reach more students in meaningful ways, yet none is a turnkey solution and each has opportunity costs. Once online courses link to library guides, what is done to promote their use? For instructional librarians, what is baseline knowledge of instructional design? What factors incentivize faculty to teach IL competencies to their students? Likewise, what makes the additional time required for a librarian to become embedded in a course worthwhile for both the instructor and the librarian?

Many academic libraries are seeking more instructional involvement as an important means of articulating their service mission, and in this context I believe these new models of information literacy instruction will become more prevalent. Happily, introducing new instructional services holds the promise of better learning opportunities for our students; this is where we should always focus our attention.

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