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Review of The New Instruction Librarian: A Workbook for Trainers and Learners

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Review of *The New Instruction Librarian: A Workbook for Trainers and Learners*

By Candice Benjes-Small & Rebecca K. Miller

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Review of *The New Instruction Librarian: A Workbook for Trainers and Learners*

New instruction librarians can easily feel overwhelmed by the vast amount of information literacy scholarship available. Accordingly, there is a real need for practical, straightforward, and comprehensive resources to help with the process of transitioning to library instruction work. Benjes-Small and Miller, in *The New Instruction Librarian: A Workbook for Trainers and Learners*, successfully fill this gap by providing a handbook for both new instruction librarians and those involved in training or supervision.

In preparation for this monograph, Benjes-Small and Miller conducted a survey that revealed many librarians had limited formal instruction coursework during their MLIS program. Of the 567 librarians surveyed, only “28% said they had taken a library instruction course while in graduate school” (p. 8). This number is disconcerting given the number of academic librarian positions that include teaching responsibilities today. As pointed out by Brecher and Klipfel in a 2014 *Communications in Information Literacy* column, “To succeed as an instruction librarian, or as any librarian with an instructional aspect to his or her position in the 21st-century library, an understanding of how students learn is critical” (p. 43).

The book is divided into four major sections. Part one begins with a focus on the identity of teaching librarians, whereas the second section goes into greater depth, outlining eight varied roles frequently assumed by these professionals. Part three focuses on strategies and approaches that will help new instruction librarians or new managers of instruction librarians go deeper into their practice. This section includes information related to observation, feedback, performance evaluation, and management.

The final section of the book is a collection of tools and templates, including sample lesson plans and assignments. Readers will find Benjes-Small and Miller’s inclusion of “Ask the Expert” scenarios throughout the book especially useful. These scenarios, written by experienced instruction librarians, provide insightful advice and an interesting window into the world of teaching in academic libraries.

After a thoughtful discussion of what it means to identify as instruction librarian in chapter one, the next chapter shifts focus and speaks directly to managers hiring instruction librarians. The authors cite the importance of conducting a needs assessment to set goals for

an instruction program prior to bringing new librarians on board. Librarians who are interested in strategically enhancing their existing instruction programs will find this chapter particularly helpful. This chapter also explores the process of recruiting talent for an instruction program; it includes advice for writing and posting job advertisements, assembling and collaborating with search committees, and reviewing and interviewing candidates. The authors also stress that successful onboarding of new hires goes beyond orientation, and should include mentoring and training for long-term development.

In part two—the largest section of the book—Benjes-Small and Miller deftly outline the “many different hats” instruction librarians wear today, considering that each of these could be a book unto itself. The subsequent chapters cover these eight roles: colleague, instructional designer, teacher, teaching partner, advocate, project manager, coordinator, and learner.

The first role explored in depth is that of *colleague*. The authors examine organizational literacy through the four frames of organizations from Bolman and Deal (2013): structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. A helpful takeaway from this chapter is the authors’ counsel to think of oneself not just as a colleague within one’s own institution, but within the wider scope of the profession on regional, state, and national levels.

The next role explored is *instructional designer*. While the authors cover basic instructional design terminology and concepts, they also emphasize that design is just one aspect of producing valuable learning experiences. The Ask the Experts section of this chapter is especially useful for those who are new to incorporating assessment into instruction. This chapter also explores the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015) through a discussion of the evolution of library instruction and its shift from tool-based bibliographical instruction to a set of frames that emphasize metaliteracy. New librarians keen to utilize the *Framework* in their teaching may wish for more detail in this area. However, as indicated by the authors, the flexibility of the *Framework* allows for its application to a multitude of unique learning contexts, and as such would be difficult to address within the scope of a single chapter. The authors do mention the *Framework* in the end of the chapter activities section, encouraging readers to review it and write learning outcomes related to a specific frame.

Chapter six introduces the role of *teacher*. The decision to situate the role of teacher so late in the section is initially surprising, but ultimately makes sense, considering instruction librarians are colleagues and designers before they set foot in the classroom. This chapter

explores the creation and execution of lesson plans, and provides advice on other important details when preparing for teaching, such as classroom set-up and technology resources.

One of the most valuable sections of the book is the examination of the role of *teaching partner* in chapter seven. Benjes-Small and Miller are candid when presenting the potential challenges faced by new instruction librarians as they seek to collaborate with faculty, yet they present a useful framework for planning those initial discussions. This connects seamlessly to the role of instruction librarian as advocate in chapter eight. Advocacy is especially relevant for new professionals who are developing personalized messaging for faculty that will highlight the importance and benefits of library instruction.

Part three moves beyond the different roles of an instruction librarian. Two chapters are dedicated to the value of instruction observation, and to performance evaluation and management of instruction librarians. While the latter chapter may seem more relevant to managers, it is also a useful read for new librarians who may be facing their first formal performance reviews.

The final section of the book is comprised of tools and templates for instruction librarians. Benjes-Small and Miller include several sample documents for supervisors, such as job advertisements, candidate criteria spreadsheets, orientation checklists, and orientation schedules. Instruction librarians will appreciate the sample learning plan template, lesson plans, assignments, and observation form.

This book is a quick, yet noteworthy read. Ultimately, its greatest strength is the examination of the multitude of roles performed by instruction librarians. The coverage of various professional roles allows new librarians, managers, mentors, and those reviewing their instruction programs to consider the great diversity of responsibilities that are involved in these positions. This book is highly recommended for new librarians with teaching duties, new managers of teaching librarians, and LIS students interested in instruction positions.

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