



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lcats

Enhancing the information literacy classroom experience: A cataloger and a reference librarian team up to deliver library instruction

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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 9 February 2011

Keywords:

Information literacy
Cataloger
Reference librarian
Liaison
Cooperative teaching

ABSTRACT

This article examines the collaborative teaching approaches between a cataloger and reference librarian. It discusses the role of instruction in liaison and collection development work, skills required to teach information literacy classes, and reviews case studies that inform the question of what skills and roles these two fields of librarianship contribute to information literacy instruction. Case studies describe the cooperative teaching partnership, examine each librarian's contribution to the collaborative effort, and discuss the benefits of partnering with other colleagues. Moreover, this study suggests liaison duties that include collection development responsibilities are enhanced by participating in instructional activities for assigned academic departments.

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1. Introduction

Liaison librarians are constantly looking for ways to build and sustain successful partnerships with teaching faculty. In order to offer a full range of services to their liaison departments, some librarians are assuming additional responsibilities and developing new skills to provide outreach services. As liaison librarians market services to their assigned departments, they must also assess their current skill set to ensure that they have the background and knowledge to offer quality services.

Instruction in the form of information literacy classes and personal research sessions (PRS) are important aspects of liaison work. Teaching skills in these types of classes however often involve a wide range of skills that can be difficult for one librarian to hold. This case study explores how collaboration with librarians in other areas of the library can lead to more holistic approaches to these teaching opportunities. The focus of the case study is a coteaching collaboration between a cataloger and a reference librarian that included library instructional sessions for anthropology students at Wake Forest University and an information literacy (IL) course. This article describes their collaborative efforts, addresses the contributions of each librarian in this cross-team partnership, and offers tips to other librarians who are interested in initiating similar cooperative teaching activities at their institutions. Moreover, this case study addresses several key questions regarding the impact of IL on other library functions such as cataloging and collection management. Specifically, it will focus on these questions: (1) What is the relationship between IL, collection management, and cataloging? (2) What impact does teaching have on a liaison's ability to effectively select and manage the library's collection for an assigned academic department? (3) What expertise and knowledge can a cataloger bring to a library instructional setting?

2. Reasons for initiating the collaborative adventure

During 2007–2009, several major events occurred at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, which prompted the Cataloging Librarian for Nonprint Materials and the liaison to the Anthropology Department to seek a collaboration with the Social Sciences Reference

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Librarian who also coordinates library instruction at Wake Forest University. The first event involved the newly hired Director of Resource Services sharing her vision of what liaisons' primary responsibilities entailed. During the June 17, 2008, liaisons' meeting, she noted that these responsibilities include teaching, consulting with faculty and students, and collection development. By teaching, the Director of Resource Services meant library instruction for discipline specific courses taught by university faculty and personal research sessions with students. Prior to this specific meeting, library instructional and personal research sessions with students were primarily provided by reference librarians.

Even before the new Director of Resources Services arrived at Wake Forest, the idea of redefining the liaison program was being considered. The Dean of the Library and the Director of Research, Instruction & Technology Services (RITS) were discussing how the liaison program could be expanded and enriched if all the liaisons worked with their respective departmental faculty in the area of teaching library instruction. By teaching classes in subject-specific areas for faculty, liaisons could develop closer working relationships with their respective academic departments while at the same time learning specifically what topics were being taught, studied and researched in the classes. Having this knowledge would enable the liaisons to become more proficient at selecting appropriate materials to add to the library's collection. The Dean's ultimate goal was for liaisons to become the primary selectors of library materials for their respective departments. The transition for this shift in responsibility would occur over a three year period, and would allow faculty to focus on their teaching and bring Wake Forest University into alignment with the norm in academia.

The second event to prompt the cataloger to collaborate with an experienced instructional librarian started as an initiative in 2007 to explore academic status for librarians. As the cataloger attended the meetings discussing academic status, she realized that teaching would become a new competency for her to master. On July 1, 2009, librarians at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library were granted faculty status. This new academic model requires librarians to assume more professional responsibilities such as teaching, scholarship, and service activities.

There is precedent for asking librarians to adopt new roles that are historically outside of their area of primary responsibility, and "it is not at all unusual for a librarian's job specifications or title to change significantly" (Coker, van Duinkerken & Bales, 2010) in an academic setting. The current economic situation may force librarians to assume additional responsibilities as universities struggle with tighter budgets and possible staff reductions. If "an economic downturn for an institution increases the necessity to employ personnel who have an even wider range of abilities and skills," (Durán, García & Houdyshell, 2009) then the prudent course of action for employees is to take a close look at their current professional qualifications and take the initiative to retrain and update job skills in order to stay competitive in the workplace. Furthermore, the current recession may motivate employees to find new ways to develop themselves. As Geoff Colvin (2009), a business journalist, notes "the great thing about a financial crisis and a recession is that they offer everyone the opportunity to be stretched in their current jobs."

All of these new expectations provided the impetus for the cataloger to examine the role of instruction in her liaison work. The cataloger has served as the library liaison for the Anthropology Department for the last 10 years. Although she suggested possible library purchases, distributed library budget information, and helped them to secure additional funding through the years, she was not actively involved in teaching library literacy classes for the faculty in the department. Adding teaching to the list of liaison work was both a good way to build additional connections to the department and to build collaborative ties with librarians in other areas of the library.

3. Learning how to teach

It is interesting to note that as graduates of ALA accredited library and information studies (LIS) programs neither the reference librarian nor the cataloger took a user-education course in library school. Historically, LIS programs have not included library instruction credit courses. In 2009, Mbabu points out "for the first time, three programs are offering IL as distinctive separate courses alongside other instructional courses" (Mbabu, 2009). Through the years, concern has been expressed from new librarians, employers, and several library organizations about the value of including courses that prepare librarians to teach. In a recent study, Click and Walker (2010) report on their findings regarding new librarians and library administrators' perspectives on training for new instruction librarians. It is interesting to note that both new librarians and library administrators agreed that "LIS programs were not adequately preparing librarians to teach." In fact, in this same article, Click and Walker report that new librarians believe that instruction courses offered in a LIS program are "valuable" in preparing librarians to teach. From the administrators' viewpoint, the ability to develop a lesson is an important teaching strategy for new librarians to master (Click & Walker, 2010).

In January 2009, the American Library Association Council approved and adopted as policy the ALA's Core Competences in Librarianship which "defines the basic knowledge to be possessed by all persons graduating from an ALA-accredited master's program in library and information studies" (American Library Association, 01/27/2009). Devised by the Special Library Education Task Force, number seven of the eight listed core competences is Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning. In points 7C and 7D of this particular competency, individuals should be familiar with and able to utilize "learning theories, instructional methods, and achievement measures; and their application in libraries and other information agencies" and the "principles related to the teaching and learning of concepts, processes and skills used in seeking, evaluating, and using recorded knowledge and information" (American Library Association, 01/27/2009).

Beginning academic librarians acknowledge that they are not adequately prepared for their instructional duties. The library literature on this topic offers numerous examples of beginning librarians describing their personal teaching experiences. Garnar (2001) points out that he was not adequately prepared to teach IL classes, while Booth (2010) states that she approached her teaching responsibilities "with nothing but terror in [her] heart." Thus, the transition from graduate school to the real world is

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