

What is Instructional Services?

by Carl J. Danis


"Instructional Services" is one of those phrases in the library business that seems to throw quite a few people off. It may also be referred to as "bibliographic instruction," "library instruction," or even the current buzzwords of "information literacy instruction." No matter what it is called, the primary goal of Instructional Services is to help patrons develop the skills to find information quickly and efficiently. Not only do we try to give patrons, usually students, the technical skills and tools to access information, but we also try to instill in them the ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret their results. Quite simply, it is our job to increase the level of "information literacy," or the ability to find all of the information they need.

The primary way in which Instructional Services reaches our patrons is through classroom instruction. Robert Arndt, Michael Alewine, June Power, and I are the librarians who take care of the majority of classroom instruction. Occasionally other librarians will provide instruction, especially if they happen to have particular expertise in an area. We prepare,

research, and present an instructional session tailored for each individual class, based on what the instructor requires and expects. Quite frequently an instructional session may be assignment-driven, meaning the instructor's assignment coincides with our session.

Typically an instructor will contact the Instructional Services Librarian and schedule a time for the class to come over and visit the Library. As a general rule, the class sessions are very flexible. The goal is to provide the students and instructor with the resources they need and the information-seeking skills to use these resources well. Usually the instructor will work with the librarian to come up with a plan for the session. We introduce the students to selected resources and give them the basic skills for navigating that resource. As instructors, we also try to emphasize how to create a search strategy, how to put together a search, and how to evaluate the search results.

We can prepare for any type of class that needs instruction

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Freshman Seminar 100 sessions to graduate level education and business courses. The instruction provided has ranged from a simple tour and introduction to the Library to in-depth research using the many different resources that are available.

Instructional Services tends to be quite busy during the semester. Since many of our instruction sessions are tied to class assignments and papers, some weeks can be more active than others. Naturally this depends on the due date for the assignment. During the fall semester we conducted 108 classes and introduced approximately 1,000 students to various aspects and resources in the library.

Within the Sampson-Livermore Library we have a modern classroom that allows us to provide demonstrations and hands-on instruction to the various classes. Our classroom has 20 student workstations with access to the Internet and a network printer. The classroom projection system allows the instructor to not only describe a particular resource, but actually show the search strategy and the results as well. The capability of the classroom allows the students to follow along and practice searching in a particular resource. Once the demonstration portion ends, they can actually search for information with help from a librarian.

Of course, all of our instruction doesn't necessarily have to take place in the Library itself. Instructional Services is more than willing to take its show on the road. We visit various classrooms and venues on- and off-campus to provide library instruction.

As the University continues its high growth rate and the Library continues to add more specialized and complicated resources, Instructional Services expects to get busier. After all, students will need to increase their "information literacy" to a much higher level as time goes on and Instructional Services will be there to help them achieve this goal.