

CONSTRUCTING A THREE CREDIT HOUR INFORMATION LITERACY COURSE: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

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BACKGROUND

With 11,911 students, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) offers 73 bachelor's degrees, 32 master's degrees and two doctoral programs. UNCW is one of 16 campuses in the University of North Carolina system and employs just over 800 faculty members. William Madison Randall Library employs 19 librarians, ten of which are responsible for delivering library instruction. The library instruction program reached over 10,000 users in the last academic year (2007/2008) through various instruction sessions.

Librarians were able to establish two one credit hour courses titled, "Library Literacy" and "The Electronic Library" in 1997. These courses were offered under "University Studies" but were taught solely by librarians. Because these courses had a "UNI" course prefix, they were not visible as "library courses" and enrollment was low.

ESTABLISHING A THREE CREDIT HOUR COURSE

Between 1997 and 2004, no other information literacy courses were established. In 2004, the Department of Computer Science at UNCW approached librarians about creating a course for an Information Technology Minor that was to be established. Partnering with an academic department would give the course a market, establish credibility for the course, and create an opportunity for librarians to offer a new information literacy course.

Many questions arose: Which librarian(s) would teach this course? What would be the content of the course? How many sections would be offered? Would the course be offered under "UNI" as the other library courses were offered or would it be

offered under the computer science prefix? If the course was offered under the computer science prefix, would the Department of Computer Science pay librarians to teach "their" course? Should the library establish a course prefix of its own? What was the procedure for adding a new course? What methods would be used to advertise and promote the course?

Librarians felt strongly that a course prefix, strictly for library courses, should be established. This would enable the library to control the course content and allow for additional courses to be added in the future. Also, offering courses under a library prefix, such as "LIB," would give courses more visibility to students. Librarians were told by library administration that a salary increase or "overload pay" would not be given if courses were taught under a library prefix despite the added responsibility. Librarians still felt strongly that it was important to have a library prefix to maintain control over course content. The first step was to approach the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) with a proposal for both establishing the course prefix (LIB) and the three credit hour course.

The Instructional Services Coordinator (ISC) for the library was an ex-officio member of the UCC and was familiar with the process departments needed to follow in order to create a new course prefix and a new course. In collaboration with the Associate University Librarian for Public Services, the ISC filled out the necessary forms and the proposals were placed on the agenda for one of the curriculum committee meetings during the fall semester of 2004. Members of the curriculum committee had several questions about the proposals. Admittedly overwhelmed and unprepared for the number of questions asked by the committee, the ISC asked that she be given time to consult with the Associate University Librarian for Public Services and report back to the committee. The ISC and the Associate University Librarian for Public Services drafted responses and delivered answers in both print and in person to the curriculum committee at their next meeting (see Appendix).

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After all curriculum committee questions were answered, the members of the committee approved both the proposed prefix and the three credit hour course. Faculty Senate then approved the prefix and the new course (LIB 103). One of the current “UNI” courses was dropped and the other course (“The Electronic Library”) was renamed “LIB 101: Introduction to Information Literacy” and was offered in the fall of 2005.

The final course name and catalog description for LIB 103 is as follows:

LIB 103. Introduction to Library Research and Technology (3) Exploration of research concepts in library science and information technology with an emphasis on the evolution of information, trends and issues in using online catalogues, subscription databases, evaluating and citing online material and using Web sites for research.

IMPLEMENTING THE COURSE

Planning and development of LIB 103 took place throughout 2005 by the Library Curriculum Committee (LCC). The committee was comprised of four librarians: the Education Librarian, the Coordinator of Research Services (who had been teaching UNI 103 the past two semesters), the Associate University Librarian for Public Services, and the ISC, who chaired the committee. It was decided that one section of the LIB 103 course would be offered in the fall of 2005. The class size was limited to 20 students and it was taught in the library’s instructional services room. This provided each student with access to a desktop computer during class for hands-on activities.

Once the course logistics were in place, the ISC, with assistance from the LCC, began creating and developing a three credit hour course “from scratch” that would fulfill the needs of the information technology minor as well as provide materials and activities that would enable students to develop information literacy skills. Committee members looked for other institutions offering similar courses and reviewed library literature for recommendations. After several months of research and discussion, the ISC developed a draft syllabus based on a combination of a course she had previously taught in the UNCW Honors program, the UNI 103 course, and course syllabi mined from other libraries’ websites. The learning objectives for the course were as follows:

- To understand the various definitions of information
- To understand the historical developments of information technologies over time
- To understand how libraries use technology for information organization, storage, access and retrieval

- To gain interdisciplinary proficiency in seeking information via electronic subscription services and library catalogs
- To recognize the difference between the World Wide Web, library catalogs and subscription services available via the Internet
- To gain proficiency in seeking information via the World Wide Web
- To critically evaluate World Wide Web information
- To become knowledgeable about information-related issues facing libraries and higher education

Learning objectives would be met by a combination of lectures, activities, class participation, tests, readings and projects.

During the spring and summer of 2005, promotional flyers were created to advertise the new course as well as promote the revised LIB 101. Flyers were sent to various campus departments and were posted in various buildings on campus, throughout the library, and were also placed on tables where students could pick them up. The LIB courses were also highlighted on the library’s homepage. In the fall of 2005, LIB 103 was filled with 20 students.

Because the initial course offering was filled, it was decided that the library would offer an additional section the following semester. In the spring of 2006, two sections of the course were offered and the same promotional strategy was used to advertise the classes. Both sections were filled to capacity and were taught by the ISC.

To assist with the growing number of LIB courses offered at Randall Library, an Instructional Services Librarian (ISL) was hired in late 2006. Using the syllabus, readings and assignments already designed by the ISC, the ISL taught one session of LIB 103 in spring 2007. In spring 2007, a total of three LIB 103 classes were offered – two taught by the ISC and one by the ISL. In fall 2007, that number increased to four LIB 103 classes, and in the spring 2008 semester, five sections were offered.

COURSE SPECIFICATIONS

In spring 2007, the ISC and the ISL used the same syllabus, developed by the ISC, for all three classes. That syllabus still guides the LIB 103 courses offered today. Beginning the course with tours of the library and its various collections gives students an orientation to the library. While many students are juniors or seniors, the tours of Special Collections, Archives, and other collections give students an opportunity to discover parts of the library most of them are unaware of prior to the tour, while also providing instructors the opportunity to introduce library vocabulary to students (primary sources, call numbers, subject

headings, and so on). Library catalogs, databases, Boolean operators, preventing plagiarism and writing proper citations take up a majority of class meetings. The final part of the semester is devoted to discussing information issues in the digital age, including scholarly communication, copyright and privacy.

The main assignments for the course are a student blog, a database presentation and an annotated bibliography. Each student has a blog to which they post summaries of, and reactions to, current news articles related to information technology and/or libraries. These blog posts are often used to spark class discussions on library or technology-related issues.

In addition to blogs and various in-class activities (some of which are based on exercises in Bukhardt, MacDonald, & Rathemacher, 2003, and Birks & Hunt, 2003), students' grades are largely determined by a group presentation on a library subscription database, and by an annotated bibliography. For their database presentations, students work in pairs investigating a database related to their majors. Student pairs are determined by the instructor, who groups students by discipline. Students research the database provider, then discuss the subjects and document types indexed by the database and, finally, show examples of searches and results. These presentations are a means of assessing students' research skills, effectiveness in using information to fulfill the assignment and comprehension of some of the social contexts of information access and use. These assessments correlate to the second, fourth, and fifth ACRL information literacy standards (ACRL, 2000).

The final project for the class is an annotated bibliography. Students chose a topic to research and locate a variety of resources on that topic. Correct citations are imperative. Requiring critical annotations, rather than abstracts, helps students analyze and evaluate their sources. The annotated bibliography assignments serve as a summative assessment of the five information literacy standards (ACRL) because it takes students from the very beginning of the research process to one step before the actual writing of a paper, while still fulfilling the requirements of a written assignment.

The ISC and ISL's LIB 103 courses remain largely the same in terms of content and assignments but, since fall 2007, differ slightly in approach. Besides changes to reading assignments and assignment weights, most changes involve Web 2.0 tools incorporated in the class. Based very loosely on Mackey and Ho's 2005 model combining research literacy and web literacy, one of the LIB courses attempts to combine research literacy and Web 2.0 literacy beyond the use of blogs. While Mackey and Ho incorporate specific information technology (IT) instruction in their model, such as teaching students XHTML and CSS, LIB 103 does not teach students particular IT languages or programs; instead, the course incorporates various information communication technologies (ICTs) as a means of delivering course content or assignments. The focus is not on the ICTs but on the course material; however, by experiencing a variety of ICTs in an instructional context, students become familiar with

the tools they use as both information consumers and information creators and how these tools are applied.

Incorporating a variety of ICTs into the course is made simple by using the open source course management system Moodle, which provides easy-to-use wikis, forums, chats, and other web 2.0 tools built into the system. An example of the Web 2.0 literacy employed in LIB 103 is the expectation that students take class notes in the wiki and collaborate in order to edit and update the notes. Each student is required to take notes for one day. Theoretically, this allows students to collectively improve the notes taken by a weaker student and help all classmates adapt their note-taking skills based on stronger students' styles, but evidence of this has yet to be determined.

Although the class meets face-to-face, both synchronous and asynchronous communication methods are employed. The class uses Moodle's chat feature for one period, during a session in which students listen to streaming audio of a public radio program. While listening, students ask questions and make comments in the chat, which is an easier way to foster and facilitate in-class conversations during this session than audibly competing with the radio program. Students also use the asynchronous technology of the forum throughout the semester to ask general questions about the class or assignments.

Another distinction between the two LIB courses, other than ICT usage, is the emphasis on group work. One instructor creates informal groups throughout the semester, developed as needed when in-class group projects are assigned. The other instructor divides the students into fixed teams, who work together throughout the semester to complete in-class assignments and projects.

As stated above, the content for both courses remains largely the same; however, some differences have developed between the ISC and ISL's focus on issues in the last part of the semester, at which time the instructors discuss various issues involving information and libraries in the digital age. Both discuss plagiarism, banned books and copyright, but the ISC focuses on scholarly communication and information overload, while the ISL focuses on free speech and media ownership. By keeping the course content, assignments and student assessments similar in all LIB 103 courses, both instructors are assured that their courses are meeting stated objectives. At the same time, both instructors customize their courses by incorporating a variety of Web 2.0 technologies into their instruction and by choosing the intellectual topics to emphasize to their students.

CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE

Along with the successes of LIB 103, there have also been challenges. During fall 2005, developing course content "from scratch" during an already busy semester was difficult for the ISC. With no financial compensation for creating and teaching the course, the ISC had to be especially dedicated to the concept of information literacy. Additional challenges became apparent

when an anonymous poll of 16 students enrolled in the class revealed students' real motivations for taking LIB 103. While some expressed an interest in learning more about library research, many stated that they signed up for the class because they hoped it "would be easy" and because "it fit into their schedule."

Overall, the process of establishing the "LIB" prefix and creating LIB 103 has been positive and rewarding. Since establishing LIB 103, LIB 104 (Library & Information Research Skills in Business) and LIB 105 (Library & Information Research Skills in the Sciences) have been established and an additional classroom space has been created. Surprisingly, offering LIB courses seemed to help bring additional attention to the instruction program at Randall Library and in turn increased the number of traditional instruction sessions offered. Because of the overwhelmingly positive response, librarians are eager to share the experience with other academic librarians in hopes that they too will embark on the path towards developing academic courses that will promote information literacy.

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APPENDIX (HANDOUTS)

Constructing a Three Credit Hour Information Literacy Course: A Blueprint for Success

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University Curriculum Committee (UCC) Questions Posed Before Approving LIB 103 at the University of North Carolina Wilmington

1. “What is the process of curricular formation within the library?”

Library’s response: “Currently, all instruction discussions occur within our Library Instruction Team (also referred to as the Primary Contact Librarian Team). We offer various instruction including UNI 103, course-related instruction, one-on-one instruction, drop-in clinics, tours, etc. This group meets bi-weekly and instruction related discussions are held at this meeting. The Associate University Librarian for Public Services has now formally created a subset of this group to serve as the library’s Curriculum Committee. All discussions and processes regarding courses or potential courses with the LIB prefix will go through this committee. This committee will model its procedures after other departmental/college curriculum committees.”

2. “Who will be teaching LIB classes? Is the MLS the terminal degree?”

Library’s response: “Librarians at Randall Library will teach all LIB classes. All UNCW Librarians are faculty (same status as all other faculty on campus). The Master’s Degree is the terminal degree for librarians. The American Library Association is the accrediting body for library professionals. According to ALA policy 54.2, ‘The master’s degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association (or from a master’s level program in library and information studies accredited or recognized by the appropriate national body of another country) is the appropriate professional degree for librarians.’ (<http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/accredfaq/faq.htm#q4>). Typically, the Ph.D. in library science is earned by individuals who plan to become professors at graduate schools of library and information science, or to direct large research libraries.”

3. “Don’t academic departments already offer a research methods course?”

Library’s response: “The library will not be duplicating any departmental research methods courses. The LIB 103 course is about finding, accessing, and evaluating information. The class will give students the skills to use online catalogs, electronic databases, print indexes, and major reference sources.”

4. “How will you determine which classes to teach?”

Library’s response: “The library currently collaborates with all departments to offer library instruction. We would continue to collaborate with departments to create classes if we feel there is an appropriate audience for them. We would not develop a course without consulting other departments and would also be completely open to team teaching these classes. All course proposals would go through the Library Curriculum Committee as well as all other appropriate campus committees.”

5. “How many classes will you teach?”

Library’s response: “The Library Curriculum Committee will address this issue. The library is not looking to offer a major in library science. The American Library Association (our accrediting body) holds strict guidelines for colleges and universities for library education. Schools offering any library degree are typically schools with a ‘library school’ and these degrees are at the master’s level. We do not wish, nor are we equipped, to offer any major or minor degree in library science. The following is a list of ALA accredited schools and universities: <http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/lisdirb/lisdirectory.htm>”

6. "Do we want students to pay for a service?"

Library's response: "The library has always been, and will continue to be, a service organization. We continue to expand our services to our patrons. Instruction is one of the many services we provide. We offer course-related instruction, drop-in clinics, one-on-one sessions, etc. We view offering the current UNI 103 class as an expanded class with a new prefix as an additional service. Students should be able to have the option to take a course which directly impacts all of their research during their college career (both undergraduate and graduate). We are not able to teach someone the entire research process during a 15 minute conversation at the Reference Desk. Students should have an optional course that enables them to fully understand the research process. We will continue to be a service department offering service and instructional support to departments to support their majors, minors, and research needs.

7. "Would you offer a LIB 101 (1 hour) and LIB 103 (3 hour) class? Some students might find it difficult to fit a three hour class into their schedule."

Library's response: "The Library Curriculum Committee will address this suggestion. We intend to offer both options. Currently we are planning to offer LIB 103 as one of the required courses for the IT Minor from Computer Science."

8. "Will you propose the LIB 103 class be included in the basic studies curriculum?"

Library's response: "One of the library's goals has always been to promote information literacy at UNCW. We want to integrate information literacy into the UNCW curriculum. There is no requirement on this campus for information literacy. Through our current instruction classes, our reference desk interactions, and one-on-one instruction with students, our goal is to promote information literacy. Ultimately we would encourage the university to adopt an information literacy component, but just like the computer literacy competency, there are a variety of ways academic departments can achieve it. Right now, we are asking for the prefix only and to be able to teach LIB 103."

9. "If you have a basic studies course, how will you accommodate all the students who would register for classes?"

Library's response: "If and when the library was to offer a basic studies course, we would be able (at a minimum) to offer 8 sections (1 section taught by each librarian on the Instruction Team) comprised of 25 students each (200 students each semester). We would also be able to utilize E-learning tools (such as online courses, tutorials, etc.) to offer the class to additional students. We would also partner with other departments to offer classes through team teaching and training."

10. "Do you have enough for a three hour credit course?"

Library's response: "Yes. The content will more than fill three credit hours. Two of our peer institutions offer similar classes (Murray State University and University of North Florida)."