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Sustainable Collaborations: Libraries Link Dual-credit Programs to P-20 Initiatives

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Abstract

This article argues for collaboration among academic libraries, academic departments, and high schools in order to strengthen articulation between the secondary and post-secondary sectors. It features work from a year-long project made possible by an LSTA grant and involving the Colorado State University-Pueblo Library, the English Composition Program, and several southern Colorado high schools that participate in the University's dual-credit program titled "Senior-to-Sophomore." This article outlines the process of using information literacy (IL) instruction to foster relationships among secondary and post-secondary instructors, improve communication between instructors and library staff within both sectors, and ultimately strengthen teaching and learning. Major challenges to an ongoing successful partnership include resources and program sustainability. The ultimate benefit, however, is the cross-institutional partnerships focused on IL instruction that benefit not only secondary to post-secondary articulation, but also the entire pre-school through graduate level (P-20) educational continuum.

Keywords: Information literacy; bibliographic instruction; elementary school students; high school students; college and university libraries; services to schools

Introduction

As we settle into the 21st century, more emphasis is being placed on collaboration as a way to best serve and appeal to millennial learners. As Laura Lefkowitz and Carolyn Woempner of Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning argue in *Building Policy Platforms for Resilience*, "Resilient platforms are characterized by responsive flexibility, distributed collaboration, transparency, and innovation and adaptation."¹ Both secondary school media specialists and academic librarians have viewed information literacy (IL) as a crucial element of student education. They understand the resource challenges that exist within different educational contexts and recognize the new ways in which students are accessing information. Given these factors, strengthening articulation between the secondary and post-secondary sectors is a way to improve teaching and learning. It also is a way to better prepare students for productive work throughout their educational, personal, and professional lives.

Addressing the fact that IL has the potential to bridge the transitional gap students experience between high school and college, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) formed a joint task force in 1998 to examine the educational role of libraries. This resulted in the "Blueprint for Collaboration," a document that outlines methods for initiating and fostering secondary/post-secondary collaboration.² While documents such as this are important in providing broad guidance for members, grassroots initiatives must complement this guidance and allow educators in the classroom an opportunity to align curricula accordingly. It is through such work that collaborative relationships will be fostered, transparency improved, strengths and challenges to instruction identified, and problem-solving initiated in ways that best serve our students.

Many academic libraries conduct outreach by partnering in ad hoc ways with local high schools to help students succeed in their aca-



demographic work. However, commitments such as formal outreach plans or curricula alignment require planning that addresses resources and the promise of sustainability. This article seeks to build upon practical considerations discussed in the literature and offers recommendations for a sustainable model of academic library outreach to high schools that contributes to campus and other pre-school through graduate-level (P-20) initiatives. In particular, this article will address the structure and implementation of a dual-credit "Senior-to-Sophomore Information Literacy Program."

Literature Review

In her February 2009 report "Writing in the 21st Century," the Past-President of the National Council of Teachers of English, Kathleen Blake Yancey, issues a call to action to "support all forms of 21st century literacies, inside and outside schools." She insists that it is time "to research and articulate new composition ... to help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future."³ Blake Yancey's emphasis is on preparing students to become effective communicators and citizens in a world that requires critical thinking and participatory writing. Likewise, librarian Dane Ward suggests, "Teaching students to think critically about information is a fundamental goal of information literacy instruction, as it should be. The lack of adequately developed information skills among a nation's citizens hinders the successful functioning of democracy and decision-making for the common good." He goes on to state, "Students do not achieve information literacy by attending one or more library sessions. Rather, students learn relevant information skills when they are systematically integrated and sequenced throughout the curriculum."⁴ Blake Yancey and Ward emphasize the importance of preparation for citizenship by evoking facets of literacy and critical thinking. P-20 initiatives serve as an avenue not only to strengthen literacy and critical thinking instruction, but also to inform instructional practices at both the secondary and post-secondary level.⁵

Jo Ann Carr identifies three practical instructional models for addressing the IL transition between secondary and post-secondary sectors: first-year experience (FYE) programs, collaborative projects by state associations and institutes, and online resources.⁶ In their 2006 article "Collaborations for Success: High School to College Transitions," Burhanna and Jensen report a number of high school-to-college collaborations occurring at Kent State. These collaborations include work within Kent State's first-year experience framework to begin initiatives and offer practical considerations for other academic libraries collaborating within the P-20 curriculum. One of the considerations suggested includes "identify[ing] programs on your campus in which high schools are involved and [making] a connection with them."⁷ In a follow-up study, Burhanna points out the absence of "any substantial research on the efficacy of instruction outreach to high school students by academic librarians" and "overlooked questions related to academic library commitment, resource levels and institutional values."⁸

A pilot project at Colorado State University-Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo), the main focus of this article, aimed to answer these challenges by building library instructional outreach initiatives with two existing campus programs as well as embedding and enriching academic library instruction within course content.

Background

During the 2006/2007 academic year, the CSU-Pueblo University Library partnered with the on-campus English Composition Program in order to pilot course-integrated library instruction based upon ACRL's IL standards.⁹ The pilot project became a prototype for all on-campus introductory composition courses taught during the fall 2007 semester. Despite having achieved some continuity throughout the English Composition Program, composition instructors were reporting that transfer students and students completing part of their composition sequence through dual-credit programs or programs through which students can earn college credit in high school did not always reflect the same level of understanding of research techniques as those students completing the full composition



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sequence on campus. The need for a library component became apparent.

Internally, CSU-Pueblo maintains a dual-credit program titled “Senior-to-Sophomore” (STS) that allows secondary students throughout urban and rural southern Colorado to take transferable, general education, college-level courses at their high schools. The STS program not only provides opportunities for advanced junior and senior high school students to take courses for college credit, it also attempts to create a seamless P-20 educational system allowing students to make a smooth transition from high school to college. STS teachers at high schools work with CSU-Pueblo faculty liaisons to best ensure college courses taught in high schools are equivalent to those taught at the University. Due to the size of the STS English Composition Program and its home on the CSU-Pueblo campus, its courses seemed an ideal platform for introducing relevant aspects of library instruction to transfer students. While this focus helped to address the larger issue of the preparation of transfer students, it also provided an opportunity for librarians to work on secondary and post-secondary curriculum alignment, set parameters, and establish reasonable goals. Other opportunities for librarians included contributing towards consistent instruction, improving the learning experience, developing trust through transparency, and addressing the important matter of sustainability.

Groundwork – the National Writing Project

The issue of preparing all students for the writing challenges they will encounter throughout their academic, professional, and personal lives has been addressed in various ways for the past thirty-five years by the National Writing Project (NWP), a professional development organization for teachers across all grade levels (P-20) and disciplines. The NWP operates more than 200 sites throughout the country, all located on college and university campuses. The NWP advances four basic principles: 1) the best teachers of writing are other teachers, 2) contemporary academic studies in the field of rhetoric and composition have practical value for writing teachers at all levels, 3) writing promotes learning in all areas of the curriculum, and 4) teachers

who are writers themselves are the most effective writing teachers.¹⁰ This professional development philosophy fosters teacher inquiry and the consideration of ways to best prepare students across grade levels for both academic and real-world success.

As argued in one of NWP’s key publications, *Because Writing Matters*,

An effective writing assignment does more than ask students to write about what they have read or experienced. It engages students in a series of cognitive processes, such as reflection, analysis, and synthesis, so that they are required to transform the information from the reading material in order to complete the writing assignment.¹¹

The effectiveness of this emphasis on the three-way connection between critical thinking, reading, and writing across the curriculum for improved student writing achievement has been established through multiple studies conducted by the NWP and confirmed recently in a “2008 NWP Research Brief.”¹² This document features nine independent studies that extend across grades three through twelve and demonstrate greater student gains in all writing traits, especially the development of ideas and organization.

Resources of the NWP were made available through the CSU-Pueblo web site. These, along with existing campus programs and resources, such as the STS Program and the Southern Colorado Writing Project (SCWP), provided the foundation on which to build an effective IL component for the STS program. The development also took advantage of strong intra-campus relationships, like the one between the CSU-Pueblo Library and the English Composition Program, and drew on the established infrastructure at the University.

STS-IL: Collaborative Processes

The Senior-to-Sophomore Information Literacy (STS-IL) project essentially was a collaborative effort of the CSU-Pueblo University Library’s Instruction Program Coordinator, the Director of Writing (who was also SCWP Director), the STS



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Program English instructors, and secondary school library media specialists. Funded in part through 2007/2008 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant monies, the STS-IL set out to create a sustainable pedagogical program for library media specialists, STS English instructors, and the University Library by standardizing IL instruction through library research modules with well-crafted assignments. The STS-IL comprised three major activities. First, it involved providing media specialists and STS instructors the opportunity to work with University faculty to include IL in class assignments. Second, it supplied STS students with the opportunity to use University library resources. Third, it developed a sustainable plan to reach all high school instructors teaching STS courses in conjunction with CSU-Pueblo.

Initially, the Director of Writing and the library's Instruction Coordinator worked together to arrange for the three-credit-hour graduate level course "ENG 500: IL for Dual-Credit Programs" to be offered through the University's Continuing Education Program via the University's course management software. The grant project was later announced to STS English instructors and a call was issued for project participants. Seven STS English instructors from seven area high schools and five different school districts were selected to participate. Notification of acceptance went to the participants, their school principals, STS school liaisons, and the University's Continuing Education Program.

The ENG 500 class, conducted during the spring 2008 semester, introduced secondary educators to ACRL IL standards and helped the educators identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (known commonly as a "SWOT" analysis) related to student research skills. Throughout the semester, STS English instructors received University support and each became active in a peer forum that discussed action-based research in their classrooms. This research involved assignment creation, critique, and experimentation throughout the semester. The Director of Writing and the Instruction Coordinator also visited the different schools throughout the course of the semester, met with media specialists, and facilitated dialogue between teachers and librarians about the chal-

lenges of incorporating University resources and tools in a secondary school setting. During these visits the Instruction Coordinator worked directly with library media specialists to teach library research at their home institutions.

Upon conclusion of the class, the Instruction Coordinator and the Director of Writing held a STS-IL grant reception at which Dual Credit Program class participants discussed their projects and assignments with a number of project stakeholders including STS teachers, the provost, college deans, high school principals, members of the University's Information Technology department, representatives from Continuing Education, and instructors from the University Library. In order to better ensure sustainability of the project and expand capacity by including more teachers in the project, follow-up meetings were scheduled involving library staff, the Director of Writing, IT personnel, and representatives from Continuing Education. STS teachers who did not participate in the pilot STS-IL program were invited to participate in an online study group that exchanged assignments and ideas and participated in an ongoing discussion about IL and the STS classroom.

Dual Credit IL Class: Further Development

During fall 2008, another course, English 500, called "Dual Credit Practice and Pedagogical Development," was offered in response to assessment results and circumstances surrounding the STS-IL Project. This course not only sustained initial coursework and allowed for more complete IL integration into the composition curriculum, it also expanded program capacity by involving more teachers in the STS-IL project. Due to changes in leadership (the current Director of Writing had become a department chairperson), this course also introduced the new Director of Writing to the current state of discussions underway regarding STS-IL and allowed her to get to know the teachers involved in the STS program. She was also provided with information that helped her to conduct her own SWOT analysis of the successes and challenges associated with STS-IL efforts. While certainly not all of the challenges were resolved with respect to STS-IL work during the grant project, conversations were sustained and efforts were



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made to continue addressing major issues connected with the program.

The following is a timeline that outlines the full grant cycle:

Fall Semester 2007: Grant project began. ENG 500 course "IL for Dual-Credit Programs" developed. Call issued for class participants.

Spring Semester 2008: ENG 500 students submitted assignments including SWOT analyses of IL in home institutions and a portfolio of STS assignments designed using existing or new IL modules. Five STS site visits were conducted, during which the Instruction Coordinator and the Director of Writing worked directly with media specialists and teachers at participant institutions.

April 2008: At the STS-IL Grant Reception, class participants presented assignments, opened a dialogue about what they had learned during the past semester, and analyzed how the experience would affect future course design.

May-August 2008: The Instruction Coordinator and Director of Writing reviewed notes from the project, class assessments, and STS instructor feedback. Meetings were called with Continuing Education and Information Technology to begin creating a streamlined process for enrolling STS students and uploading their profiles into the IT systems for quicker off-campus access to library subscription databases. A new ENG 500 course, "Dual Credit Practice and Pedagogical Development," was created.

Fall Semester 2008: Instructors teaching STS classes who had not participated in the spring semester course were invited to take the "Dual Credit Practice and Pedagogical Development" course. A space was set up in the course management software that allowed for exchange of ideas and assignments and provided a collaborative workspace for all STS instructors. Grant project concluded.

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered during the STS-IL and the IL for Dual-

Credit Programs class. Throughout the grant project, nineteen STS teachers took advantage of this opportunity to gain re-certification credits through University classes. The project also provided incentives for teachers to collaborate with their media specialists. All six original teachers finished the spring 2008 class with completed SWOT analyses, portfolios, and well-developed IL modules to incorporate the following semester.

Many instructors indicated they were planning to use information from the SWOT analyses when speaking with their administrators about the STS program. Comments on this assignment included the following:

This assignment was very beneficial to me and I hope to use it in discussions with my administration... .

and

Ultimately, this assignment asked me to think specifically about many things. One surprising benefit was getting to know our new media specialist. My respect for her has grown since I know that she has goals for our school, worries that we need to replace equipment, knows of many resources, and is so willing to team-teach the research unit if invited to participate.

One-hundred seventy-eight STS students were granted access to University databases and were working on assignments enhanced with IL modules throughout the spring 2008 semester. Thirty people, including administrative stakeholders, took part in the STS-IL grant reception that highlighted teacher accomplishments. Feedback gathered during class discussions or communicated directly to the University course instructors throughout the grant project highlighted a number of issues connected with program effectiveness, efficiency, and instruction. While all STS class participants were familiar with Colorado's IL standards for high school students, the different school districts and the University did not share a vision of IL and what it means to the STS curriculum. Conversations throughout the semester began to build a shared vision and common language to help the in-



structor and class participants communicate with various stakeholders in different institutions.

Two major discoveries of more practical concern required additional consideration by the University and partnering STS schools in order to ensure that post-secondary standards and learning outcomes were met in the STS classes. First, the Director of Writing and the Instruction Coordinator collaborated during the following summer in an attempt to better streamline the enrollment process for STS students as well as sustain the initial pilot project through professional development opportunities for STS instructors. Second, STS students needed to be enrolled earlier in the semester to allow the University's IT department time to grant access to the course management software and to library databases. Along with this, STS instructors needed regular access to computer labs and library resources (such as books and databases) as well as support from library media specialists. Instructors also needed time for professional development work in order to align course expectations and outcomes with those of the University.

Assessment

Extending this study into the current period and beyond has taught us that sustainable collaborative practices, like those identified and enacted throughout the STS-IL grant process, need to become part of the department and/or institutional culture and not made dependent upon certain individuals and/or roles. Due to changes in leadership (a new Director of Writing), program continuity was mildly disrupted. As well, before the project could move forward, it became necessary to provide professional development for teachers that included strategic conversations with key figures and academic officers concerning STS-IL results as well as the STS program in general.

As a result, the general philosophy of the program became more assured and the commitment of the English department and the library continued. The English department maintained resources for project support, although the for-

ward momentum of the project stalled slightly when it was realized that the policies and procedures necessary for sustaining access and providing resources were not in place. Subsequently, it was necessary to re-engage some of the same discussions that had taken place during early stages of the project to address these issues. Yet even with the change in leadership in the department, the focus on improving communication and collaboration among all constituents—STS instructors, University staff and faculty, secondary schools, and the University community—remained the same. In short, it is clear that buy-in from both educational sectors was essential for program success. Consistent education and re-education about program needs were also necessary, as was the dedication of resources to such a project.

Sustainability: Guidelines for the Future

The most serious challenge to the STS-IL project is sustainability. In this particular case, leadership, resources, and a shift in institutional perspective all challenged project continuity. The following is a list of potential stumbling blocks that, if overlooked, might impede progress in any similar venture:

1. Leadership: A project should not be attached to a specific individual and should be positioned to survive if changes in leadership occur. A team approach is helpful for project continuity, as are written guidelines, goals and objectives, and policies and procedures.
2. Resources: A dedicated resource stream is always preferable, but not always possible. Hence, it is important to think strategically about how to leverage existing resources and ensure that a program will survive despite challenges in this area.
3. Institutional knowledge: Consistent education and reeducation concerning the role of IL in all aspects of learning and for fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills is essential. An investment in ongoing professional development within both the secondary and post-secondary sectors is crucial to this process.



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4. Public profile: Maintaining a public profile is necessary for gaining community buy-in and promoting the relevance of this work. Education and reeducation of community stakeholders is as essential as building institutional knowledge.

Conclusion

Academic libraries, like the institutions they serve, have many obligations and competing priorities for their time and resources. P-20 partnerships are an important priority worth sustaining since they have the potential to contribute to campus educational initiatives, better prepare transfer students, and provide educators with an opportunity to align curricula between the secondary and post-secondary sectors. Successful library participation in P-20 partnerships requires initial planning to set parameters, establish resources and goals, and address the sustainability of partnership participation. While partnership parameters and goals are often more easily established, providing resources and sustaining a program over a period of time is challenging. This article emphasizes creating secondary and post-secondary collaborations, but we see a need to explore additional research questions:

- How can library resources be collected and/or maximized with dual credit or concurrent enrollment programs in mind?
- How can libraries and their involvement in P-20 initiatives contribute to a developing culture of student learning assessment across educational sectors?
- Are there ways in which academic libraries can link efforts in dual credit programming to increased post-secondary retention rates?
- How can academic libraries support professional development opportunities and faculty research through P-20 initiatives?

In this time of economic uncertainty for public education, it is important to think creatively about leveraging existing resources that provide the support necessary for partnership success. Just as the STS-IL project engaged existing programs (STS and SCWP) to improve cross-institutional communication and quality re-

search in STS courses, programs need to make use of resources that better support the instructors, departments, and students involved. These resources include: course management software access, course-related supplies (books, manuals, etc.), professional development sessions sponsored through existing programs like the SCWP, and the opportunity for course credit that may be used for teacher recertification.

Leveraging resources in this way, and sharing responsibility and improving transparency through collaboration (as represented in the dual credit programs discussed here), demonstrate innovative thinking and adaptive strategies for addressing the reality of education today and meeting the needs of our millennial learners. In this way educators—librarians and teachers alike—model through their actions. They also help students understand and adopt modes of critical thinking and problem solving, and engage diverse forms of communication that both Kathleen Blake Yancey and Dane Ward see as essential to molding strong 21st century citizens.

Endnotes

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⁴ Dane M. Ward, "Revisioning Information Literacy for Lifelong Meaning," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 4 (2006): 397.



⁵ For an excellent discussion of citizenship education, see: Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

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⁷ Kenneth J. Burhanna and Mary L. Jensen, "Collaborations for Success: High School to College Transitions," *Reference Services Review* 34, no. 4 (2006): 510-17.

⁸ Kenneth J. Burhanna, "Instructional Outreach to High Schools: Should You Be Doing It?" *Communications in Information Literacy* 1, no. 2 (2007): 76.

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¹⁰ See "About" the National Writing Project website: <http://www.nwp.org>.

¹¹ Carl Nagin, *Because Writing Matters* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 47.

¹² National Writing Project, "NWP 2008 Research Brief," National Writing Project, accessed June 3, 2011, <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2668>.

