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Teachers, Partners, Co-Mentors: Collaborating to Improve Research and Writing Instruction

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Teachers, Partners, Co-Mentors: Collaborating to Improve Research and Writing Instruction

Alex R. Hodges, Alison B. Thomas,
& Patricia J. West
American University
Washington, DC



Intro to American University

Private, est. 1893

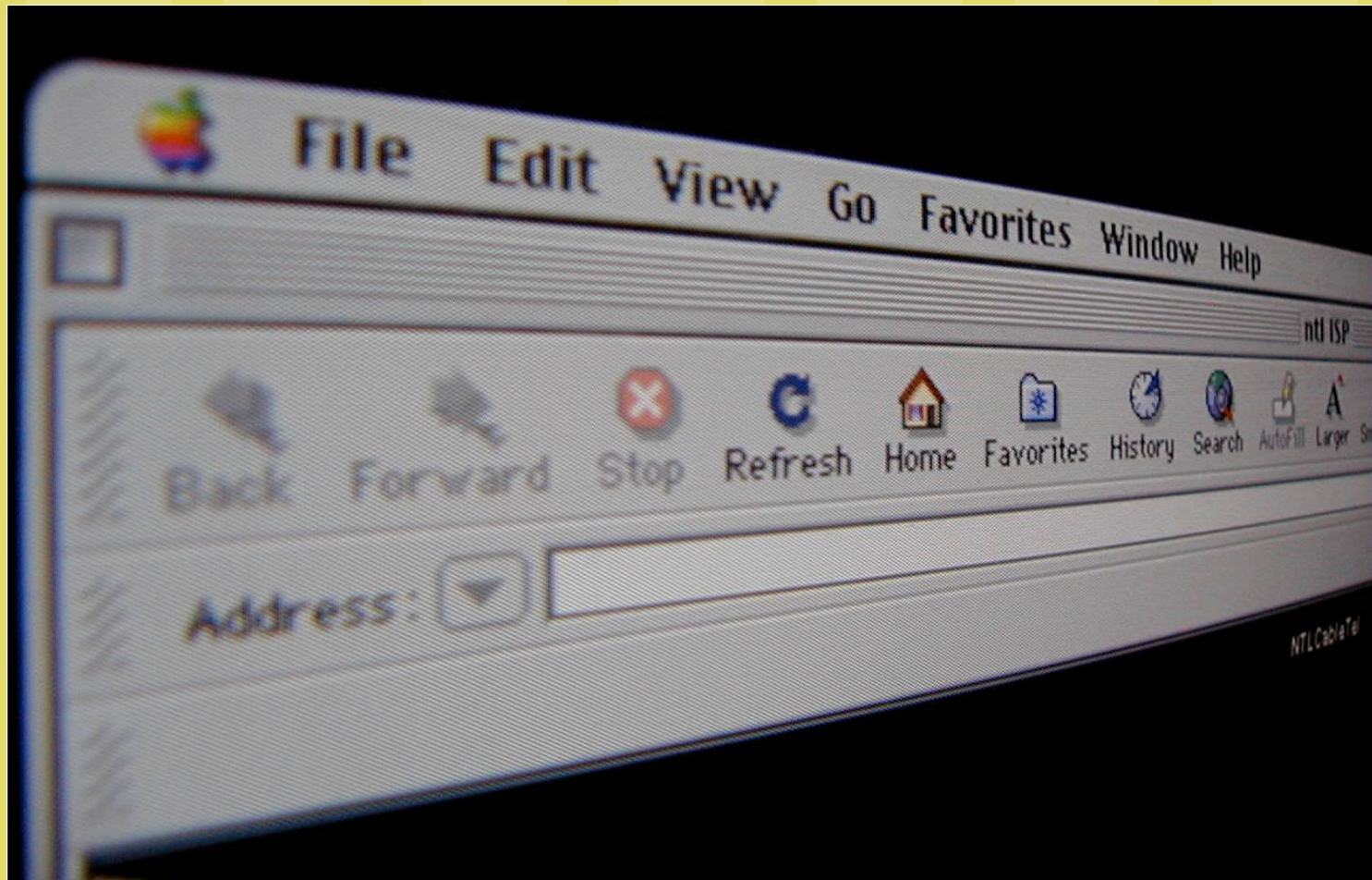
Located in DC at the top
of Embassy Row

FTE = 12,000, roughly
half are undergraduates

Academic focus:
applied social sciences
global social justice



College Writing @ AU



College Writing @ AU

Students satisfy the College Writing requirements of the program via completion of a 6-credit, 2-course sequence during the freshman year.

Requirement may also be satisfied through Advanced Placement English Test score of 4 or 5.

Transfer students must have had 6 credits elsewhere to waive College Writing, but still must pass an English Proficiency Examination.

85% percent of freshmen take College Writing.

College Writing & Library Faculty at AU

College Writing Faculty

- 18 adjuncts
- 19 full-time instructors
- Writing Center Director
- Director of the Writing Program
- Specialist in Second-Language Writing
- Adjuncts teach 2-3 classes per year
- Full-time instructors teach 6 classes per year

Teaching Librarians

- 3 adjuncts
- 10 full-time librarians
- Director of Research & Teaching
- Specialist in English Language Teaching
- Adjuncts pair with ~2-10 classes per year
- Full-time librarians pair with ~10-12 classes per year

Information Literacy Plan

Tiers 1 & 2

Consider. . .

- Cognitive load
- Curriculum focus
- Student level
- Collaboration
- Technology skills

Like tiers of delicious cupcakes...



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/9872430@N05/1306780757/>, DotsTreats

The Writing Program and Research

College Writing Program Grading Criteria

- Rubric considers major components of writing: Audience, Thesis & Support, Organization, Response to Assignment, Grammar and Form.

Audience	The writing reflects superior audience awareness. It actively engages its reader and makes a clear point that is supported with excellent reasoning, evidence, and detail emerging from appropriate research. It also provokes the reader to reflect on the topic's subtleties and complexities.
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Thesis & Support	The writing has a critically reasoned, original thesis that is strategically placed and substantiated through reliable, relevant, and sufficient evidence.
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Library-College Writing Partnership

Relationship between the two units goes back to early 1990s.

Interaction has generally consisted of librarian giving one library instruction session--one-shot deal.

In recent years relationship has expanded to more comprehensive instruction; every College Writing instructor is paired with a librarian and collaboration is spread throughout the semester/year.

In a typical year librarians give an average of 125 sessions to College Writing students, not including personal appointments.

The Library-College Writing Partnership: Original Intentions

Provides better learning experience for students, more academic support, more assignment-focused instruction.

Allows students to develop personal relationships with librarians that can be carried into subsequent courses and years at the university.

Enables communication between instructors and librarians.

Facilitates integration of information literacy for students at beginning of their college career.

Challenges

Instructors OR librarians think...

1. Librarians are “librarians.”
2. Time constraints limit creativity & planning.
3. Programmatic support is lacking.
4. Partnership is hard.
5. Class time should be spent wisely.
6. Students express overconfidence in research skills.



<http://www.charismatips.com/what-men-think-about-womens-buns/>

The Need for Change: Articulating a New Vision



<http://frankandernest.com/>

The Library Committee is Born

Timeline:

- * January 2008: College Writing Research Colloquium held.
- * Fall 2009: The College Writing Program's Governing body (The College Writing Council) breaks into sub-committees tasked with handling specific issues.
- * Five members of the writing program faculty (self-selected) form the committee.
- * Invitation extended to librarian colleagues.
- * First meeting: November 2009

Agenda included:

- Define the purpose of committee
- Plan tasks for academic year 09-10

Shaping our Mission

Reading Feedback: Library Survey 08

Positives:

- "A successful library session."
- "Working with my librarian is helpful in both planning my research assignments and executing them."
- "The librarian adapts her lessons to my assignments and needs."
- "My students know early on in the semester that they have a contact in the library, which is comforting to them."
- "My librarian has great ideas when I'm stuck, a good rapport with students, and a professional demeanor that's top-rate."
- "My librarian listens to my ideas, takes risks with me, and aids me when I lack resources or knowledge."

Things to work on:

- "I'm confused about the services available to me."
- "My librarian moved too slowly through the material."
- "Many of my students drifted away from the instruction."
- "I just wish I knew how to make better use of [my librarian's] skills."
- "The presentation was too elementary."
- "The presentation needs to be more participatory."

Shaping our Mission

Reading Feedback: CW Survey 2009

Distributed to all full-time College Writing faculty

Possible "values" included everything from finding books to reviewing MLA top rated research instruction values:

- Knowing how to use basic databases (JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCO)
- Learning the difference between scholarly and popular source
- Using subject specific databases (PsycInfo, Sociological Abstracts, etc)
- Working with / varying search terms
- Developing search strategies

Conclusions from Surveys

- There were few responses to the surveys.
- Those submitted reflect a range of values, and a sense that the library session should do all of these things.
- The needs of the faculty members don't reveal an isolation of skills.
- Having one library session is the norm.
- Many faculty members don't have a strong sense of the possibilities of the partnership.
- We can be more creative as teachers and librarians in our information literacy instruction by:
 - focusing library sessions to particular skills,
 - sponsoring and encouraging stronger relationships,
 - working on a more concerted partnership.

Approach to Change

Pros of Partnership

- Comfort
- Most natural allies
- Set learning outcomes
- Programmatic efforts
- Culture of teaching

Improvements Needed

- Scheduling
- Reduced resources
- Classroom use
- Creativity
- Academic freedom
- Communication

Library Committee Agenda 09-10

- Do a Teaching Round Table.
- Do a colloquium.
- Initiate more meaningful contact between teachers and librarians.
- Use 09 survey as a set of talking points that should inspire discussion between teachers and librarians.
- Create instruction modules.

The Modules

Idea was to develop templates for instructors and librarians that could easily be plugged into lesson plans.

Modules had to be--

- tied to specific learning objectives,
- clearly articulated and easy to follow,
- easy to implement in confines of 75-minute class,
- linked to specific, interactive exercises, not just lecture,
- easy to duplicate.

The Research-Writing Modules: Selected Topics

- Using the Internet for research
- Citing sources
- Developing and refining search strategies
- Discerning scholarly sources
- Using subject-specific databases
- Teaching skeptical research skills

Sample Module-Standard Form

Teaching Module for Bibliography Research Trail (Citation Trailing...)

Purpose / teaching goals:

- Tracing the development of research
- Understanding citations and the variety of research formats
- Finding additional relevant research on a focused topic

Preparation: Students would benefit from having completed the 1... introduced to MLA citation conventions.

Time: Demo would take a quarter of the beginning of class. The... time. The last quarter of class would be a report back to the group.

Materials required: students could bring their laptops to class or v... classroom 306; research activity handout.

This module has three parts. All are meant for in-class work – co... classroom.

Part I – Demonstration and Discussion

- Start by showing an example of a text/chapter/s...
- The difference between in-text citations and bibliography
- The different formats (books, chapters, articles, electronic documents, web pages) of publications cited in the bibliography
- The context clues of distinguishing between citation information that could be used to track down the citation (author, journal title, book/chapter titles, etc.)
 - Discuss that Internet sources in citations may be obsolete as URLs change/disappear.
 - Look as a class at a sample scholarly article's bibliography and in-text citations.
 - Show how to track down a book – search... to search for a book chapter – search the catalog by...
 - Show how to track down an article – se... (<http://vg5ly4ql7e.search.serialssolutions.com/>) by... journal article.
 - Show how to track down a web site – se... keywords from the citation.

Part II – Practice

- Put students in groups to look at examples of an article.
- Give each group a worksheet to assess the article and its bibliography.
- Have the students search for items from the article.
- Go over the results and see what they learned about...
- A second copy of the worksheet could be handed out for each student to assess an article or book chapter's bibliography that they find independently that has to do with their research topic.

- Purpose
- Preparation
- Time
- Materials

Part 1: Demonstration and Discussion

Part 2: Practice

Access to the Modules

The screenshot displays a Blackboard Learn interface within a Windows Internet Explorer browser. The address bar shows the URL: https://blackboard.american.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_tab_group_id=2_1&url=%2Fwebapps%2Fblackboard%2Fexecute%2Flauncher%3Ftype%3DCours. The page header includes the American University logo and navigation links for My Institution, Courses, My Places, Home, Help, and Logout. The main content area is titled "CWP Faculty CWP-600 Announcements" and features a navigation menu on the left with buttons for: Announcements, Site Information, Faculty Information, CWP Documents, CWP Reading Group, Writer as Witness, Discussion Board, Groups, Web Sites, User Tools, Holiday Music, Library Teaching Modules, and Articles for Teaching. The central "Announcements" section contains a welcome message: "Welcome to the CWP Faculty Website! If this is your first visit to the site, welcome! Take a look around. The 'Site Information' section gives you a quick overview of what you'll find here. If you're returning, you'll notice some changes, mostly cosmetic, but others in an attempt to make the site more intuitive and useful. It is, though, a work in progress: any suggestions or advice are always welcome. (Just email Chuck Cox at ccox@american.edu) Enjoy!" The message is attributed to Charles Cox, posted on Wednesday, September 13, 2006. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications, including Google Docs, Blackboard Learn, and a syllabus document, with the system clock indicating 12:20 PM on 09/22/2010.

The Library-College Writing Partnership: Professional Benefits

Adds credibility to the role of librarians as teachers

Has acted as a model for accomplishing this type of partnership in other academic units on campus (for example, SIS 206)

Provides opportunity for advocacy (more on this later)

Parallels between fields of information science and composition have been established: Jeff Purdue, James Elmborg

Professional Benefits Advocacy



Professional Benefits: Two-Way Pedagogical Support

- Adjunct faculty issues
- New library and teaching faculty issues
- All lead to advocacy for each other

Professional Benefits: Legitimacy

Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson (2005)

Information Literacy: A Collaborative Endeavor

"Librarians can... be a critical resource in the planning stages of a course. They can help a professor assess what research-related skills students might have or lack, and make suggestions about ways to help students meet the research challenges of the course."

"Librarians... are cognizant of ways to increase students' evaluation or critical thinking skills in relation to information and its sources."

"Faculty can provide input to librarians about student experiences with library resources... The work of faculty in the classroom can also provide librarians with essential feedback about the ways students interpret, analyze, and evaluate research materials within a disciplinary context."

"Faculty can also update their own information literacy skills through an open dialogue..."

Students in Focus



Benefits for Students

- Helps librarians become a recognizable resource that will last for the duration of the student's college experience

Jacobs and Jacobs: after collaborative efforts, studies found that "students, seeing their librarian at the reference desk, often stopped by for further assistance" and that "students, understandably, are often more frank with their librarians... about what they like or do not like about a particular assignment."

- Emphasizes research as a process that involves revision

Jacobs and Jacobs wonder: "Why is it... that we incorporate these concepts into the teaching of writing... but not into the teaching of research?"

Modeling the "Academic Conversation"

Collaboration "puts into dialogue two practitioners in two different disciplines but also two bodies of scholarship and professional knowledge."

Heidi LM Jacobs and Dale Jacobs (2009):

"Transforming the One-Shot Library Session into Pedagogical Collaboration"



College Students and the Academic Conversation

David Bartholomae: "Inventing the University" (1985)

- Argues for the necessity of discourse-oriented instruction
- Students must learn to "speak the language" of particular disciplines / communicate in "the various discourses of our community" to join an ongoing conversation

Collaboration and Information Literacy Instruction

"The synergy that happens through team teaching may offer students the best opportunity to apply information literacy within the context of a specific discipline. This approach also models for students the benefits of exploring topics from multiple perspectives."

Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson (2005),
"Information Literacy: A Collaborative Endeavor"

Imitation allows students to "[locate] themselves within the discourse of a particular community - within a set of specifically acceptable gestures and commonplaces"
David Bartholomae (1985), "Inventing the University"

How Do We Model the Academic Conversation in the Classroom?

What we say:

- "This is Alex. He's an expert in information literacy and research."
- "Alex and I work together to craft your assignment."
- "Alex's name, photo and contact info are in our syllabus."

What it means:

- Each discipline has its own experts and authorities.
- A librarian is an authority on information literacy and it's recognized in other disciplines (like writing).
- Each discipline has its own discourse ("information literacy," for example, will probably be a new term for students).

Collaboration as Model (cont'd)

What we say...

- "Alex helps me decide how to compose the research elements of your work."
- "We talk about what needs to happen in your assignments (what I'd like you to get out of it) and what skills you need (what research tools Alex would like you to master.)"
- "Alex and I will help you apply what you're learning to the research assignment you're working on."

What we mean...

- Alex and I talk to each other about research. Alex teaches me things about research, and I teach him things about writing.
- Both Alex and I will talk about research and information literacy. We'll talk about it in different ways, but still we can communicate with each other.
- Alex is going to help you use the expertise of his discipline to apply to another discipline (writing).

The Library Committee: Looking Ahead

Library Committee AY 2010-11

11 members (3 librarians, 8 instructors)

Agenda:

- Creating more modules
- Marketing modules to teachers and librarians
- Developing a technology platform for the modules
- Sharing modules with larger university community as a means of advocacy

Looking Ahead (cont'd)

1. Comparing the ways librarians evaluate research in writing vs. how instructors evaluate research
2. Re-considering grading rubric: how research work and information literacy are evaluated
3. Collecting assessment data
 - determining evaluative criteria
 - measuring research skills outside of papers (tests, quizzes, tutorial, etc)
 - assessment of the modules
 - assessment of partnerships
 - assessment by students



Activity and Discussion

- What kind of research is required of students?
- What kind of library resources will they need access to?
- What information literacy skills will they need to master to be able to complete the assignment?
- How many library sessions would this require?
- What would the library session look like? (Would it be interactive? Would it involve solo-work?)
- Would students have time to search/ ask questions on their own (specific to their own topics)?
- How can the instructor and/ or librarian assess how well the students have understood and retained the information?

Thank you!

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For session slides, bibliography, sample modules and continuing conversation:

<https://sites.google.com/site/teacherspartnerscomentors/home>