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### Saint Mary's College of California: Trust and Tradition on a Tightknit Campus

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Chapter 16

# Saint Mary's College of California

Tradition and Transparency on a Tight-Knit Campus

Gina Kessler Lee and Conrad M. Woxland

# **Population Served**

Saint Mary's College of California (SMC) is a private Catholic liberal arts college of 2,675 undergraduates and 1,086 graduate students. Located in a suburb of San Francisco, SMC is a Lasallian institution with a number of Christian Brothers teaching and serving on campus, which influences its strong social justice mission.<sup>1</sup>

The college has four schools: the School of Liberal Arts, the School of Economics and Business Administration, the School of Science, and the Kalamanovitz School of Education. SMC offers forty-three majors for undergraduate students, with an average class size of nineteen.<sup>2</sup> The student population is 45 percent white and 47 percent students of color,<sup>3</sup> and the college is a Hispanic-Serving Institution.<sup>4</sup> There are more female students on campus than male students. More than half of undergraduate students live on campus.<sup>5</sup> All students, regardless of major, take Collegiate Seminar, a four-semester series that focuses on student-led discussion surrounding a common syllabus of readings from the Western canon, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and others, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Couple these intimate classes with the small campus situated in a semirural environment, and students begin to feel ownership of the college's physical spaces. The library building is often very busy, and students utilize both the silent study areas and

group study rooms often. A reference desk shift can be punctuated by students stopping by just to say hello or announcing a grade received on a research paper a librarian assisted with. Library staff are proud of creating a positive culture where students are not shy about asking for help within or outside of a library instruction session. Students at SMC expect to create close relationships with faculty and staff and interact with people casually and without being intimidated.

# **Program Scope**

Librarians teach library sessions for both undergraduate and graduate students, with one-third of instruction hours being devoted to introductory composition courses. Librarians communicate directly with faculty in their liaison departments to coordinate and teach library sessions. Rather than scheduling and delegating library sessions, the information literacy coordinator's (known at SMC as the "Instruction and Outreach Coordinator") role is instead to give direction for the instruction program as a whole.

Information literacy (IL) instruction is typically based around a research assignment, takes place in person, and occurs when a course instructor is willing to collaborate. Librarians can assist faculty and instructors in integrating IL content into the campus course management system, with online web tutorials, and with the development of research assignments. However, most requests from instructors are for in-person bibliographic instruction, and librarians rely on building relationships and trust in order to incorporate more advanced or critical information literacy-related learning objectives. This system can lead to librarians in some cases feeling that they are at the whim of the instructor, and when asked to do minimal instruction feel that is all they are allowed to do. Other times, librarians can be asked to do too much and must tactfully pull back from a department that is saturated. Librarians offer a wide spectrum of instruction, from twenty-minute database showcases in some business courses to a chemistry course where the librarian is embedded, attends every class, and is listed as a co-instructor on the syllabus.

It is difficult for librarians to scaffold instruction in a given department due to variance in instruction requests between classes and instructors, and also because most students progress through the Core Curriculum and their major in an unpredictable order. 6 Each major's Writing in the Disciplines class would be an ideal place to deliver information literacy instruction, but library instruction in these courses is not required, and many of the faculty teaching these courses decline our offers of instruction. Librarians are currently piloting information literacy curriculum mapping for each department to better communicate this situation to faculty.

At the undergraduate level, IL is built into the curriculum as Information Evaluation and Research Practices (IERP) learning outcomes that are part of the "habits of mind" area of the Core Curriculum (see figure 16.1) and are expected to be taught in the composition program and a Writing in the Disciplines course in each of the majors. IL also overlaps heavily with the Core Curriculum's Critical Thinking (CT) learning outcomes (see figure 16.1).

At the graduate level, all students are expected to achieve Scholarly Research and Information Literacy learning outcomes (see figure 16.1), but how, when, and to what extent they are taught these skills varies by program. For example, programs in the School of Education, which require students to complete a research-based thesis, dissertation, or action research project, typically include more information literacy instruction than the

graduate programs in the School of Economics and Business Administration or the School of Liberal Arts. In the kinesiology graduate program, students receive library instruction in their sports law class, which includes discussion of primary and secondary legal sources and how to find and access relevant court decisions, statutes, and law reviews in databases such as Nexis Uni.

#### **Undergraduate Learning Outcomes**

Information Evaluation and Research Practices

With increasing proficiency, students will

- Develop search strategies and use library catalogs and databases to find relevant material; and
- 2. Critically evaluate sources; and
- 3. Integrate and cite evidence appropriately. In addition, students will
- 4. Understand the concept of intellectual property and practice academic honesty.

#### Critical Thinking

With increasing proficiency, students will

- 1. Identify and understand assumptions and theses that exist in the work of others; and
- 2. Ask meaningful questions, originate plausible theses, and identify their own underlying assumptions; and
- 3. Seek and identify confirming and opposing evidence relevant to original and existing theses: and
- 4. Evaluate and synthesize evidence for the purpose of drawing valid conclusions.

#### **Graduate Learning Outcomes**

Scholarly Research and Information Literacy

With increasing proficiency, students will

- 1. Understand when information or research is needed:
- 2. Acquire and critically evaluate data, information, and research appropriate for the field:
- 3. Make appropriate and ethical use of data, information, and research in projects, papers, or performances.

#### Figure 16.1

Information Evaluation and Research Practices undergraduate learning goals and outcomes, and Scholarly Research and Information Literacy learning outcomes for master's degree programs.

The composition program is comprised of three classes:

- English 3: Practice in Writing (developmental English for students with lower incoming test scores)
- English 4: Composition (required for all students except for those with high incoming test scores or an equivalent course from another institution)
- English 5: Argument and Research (required for all students except for transfer students with an equivalent course from another institution)

Every English 4 and 5 class requires one to three library sessions (depending on the professor's preference, in consultation with their librarian), and most English 3 instructors also opt for a library session. Every English 4 class assigns a small research essay, while

every English 5 class assigns an eight-to-twelve-page research essay that requires at least three peer-reviewed, scholarly sources. These sessions are largely taught by the English liaison librarian, who is also the Instruction and Outreach coordinator. A part-time librarian assists the coordinator with the instruction, and some librarians with less intensive instruction commitments help out as needed.

Until 2014, English 4 instruction was divided among all librarians, but with the hiring of a new first-year programs librarian, instruction was consolidated among three librarians for greater consistency and to allow the other librarians to focus on their own liaison departments. At that time, the composition librarians revised the library curriculum to intentionally scaffold research skills between English 3, 4, and 5, with a focus on source evaluation. The scaffolding was developed for the Core Curriculum's IERP and CT learning outcomes as shown in table 16.1.

#### **Table 16.1**

General learning outcomes scaffolded between the three composition courses and Writing in the Disciplines classes in the majors. Learning outcomes IERP 4, CT 1, and CT 4 are not directly taught in this scaffolding model.

English 3: Practice in Writing	English 4: Composition	English 5: Argument and Research	Writing in the Disciplines courses				
IERP 1: With increasing proficiency, students will develop search strategies and use library catalogs and databases to find relevant material.							
Students are able to find and use basic library services and collections (e.g., get to website, check out books).  Students are able to use discovery service to find different types of sources.	Students are able to use some interdisciplinary databases for finding information (e.g., Opposing Viewpoints, discovery service, Credo Literati).	Students are able to use advanced techniques (e.g., Boolean) to search the library catalogs and databases for relevant evidence. Students are able to reflect on their own search strategies.	Students are able to develop search strategies and use library databases appropriate for their discipline.				
IERP 2: With increase	IERP 2: With increasing proficiency, students will critically evaluate sources.						
Students are able to identify and articulate the differences between different source formats.	Students are able to evaluate sources of information using provided criteria.  Students are able to construct their ow criteria for evaluate sources and use the to evaluate an article.		Students are able to critically evaluate scholarly sources according to the conventions of their discipline.				
IERP 3: With increasing proficiency, students will integrate and cite evidence appropriately.							
<b>Optional:</b> Students understand how to cite sources and avoid plagiarism.	Students understand how to cite sources and avoid plagiarism.	Students understand why to use and cite sources. Students cite their sources accurately in MLA style.	Students are able to cite their sources according to their discipline's preferred citation style.				

English 3: Practice in Writing	English 4: Composition	English 5: Argument and Research	Writing in the Disciplines courses			
CT 2: With increasing proficiency, students will ask meaningful questions, originate plausible theses, and identify their own underlying assumptions.						
	Optional: Students are able to narrow their topic to an appropriate scope (originate plausible theses).  Optional: Students are able to analyze the arguments of others and reflect on assumptions and how they relate to the student's own assumptions on the topic.	Students are able to develop a research question of appropriate scope. Students practice letting the research lead them to new ideas (and, eventually, a thesis), rather than trying to fit the research into prior assumptions.				
	g proficiency, students nt to original and existi	will seek and identify c ing theses.	onfirming and oppos-			
<b>Optional:</b> Students are able to find opinion articles expressing different viewpoints on the same topic.	Students are able to seek, identify, and reconcile sources representing different viewpoints in response to their research question.					

The composition librarians created a shared lesson plan to meet these learning outcomes in English 4 and English 5 classes, but the lesson plan can be adapted to the class's particular assignment, the competencies and curiosities of the particular students, and the desires of the faculty member teaching the course.

Outside of credit-bearing disciplinary classes, SMC Library does not generally host optional information literacy workshops for students, due to low attendance in the past. However, the library hosts monthly information literacy-related workshops for faculty and staff on topics such as financial research, new library databases, using the College Archives, research assignment design, and researching ballot measures, which are moderately well attended. While we would love to implement a "teach the teacher" model that empowers faculty to teach their students information literacy skills,<sup>7</sup> on this campus, getting participation from every department and requiring identifiable improvements would require faculty compensation in the form of stipends or course releases, which we don't have the resources to provide at this time.

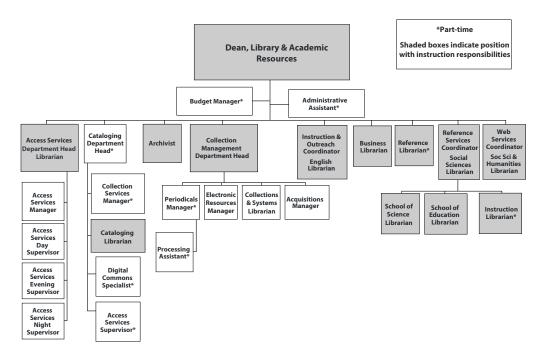
# **Operations**

The library has one classroom (see figure 16.2), which contains a projector, interactive whiteboard, and twenty-four laptops. The room has five large whiteboards that are used for group work and icebreaker activities. Scheduling for the room is done on a first-come, first-served basis in Google Calendar. Librarians can also reserve a large conference room in the library (with an instructor station and iPads in place of laptops) or, if necessary, a classroom computer lab in another building.



**Figure 16.2** Library classroom

Like many midsize libraries, SMC Library is a horizontal organization with only a few supervisory positions (see figure 16.3). This library employs twenty-eight staff members, including fourteen librarians. Some reference and instruction librarians report to the dean, while others report to the Reference Services Coordinator. Organizationally, there are departments for access services, collections, and cataloging; there is no reference or instruction department. Instead, instruction librarians meet every four to six weeks, led by the instruction coordinator, to maintain group communication, set and track progress on goals, and discuss changes or challenges.



**Figure 16.3** SMC Library organizational chart

Most librarians at SMC do instruction, but the amount they do depends on their other responsibilities. For example, some of the instruction librarians head a department, while others are the liaison for an entire school, and others lead a function such as reference or web services. In contrast with larger institutions where librarians may be more specialized, balancing the many different responsibilities can be challenging. For instance, when the instruction coordinator initiated a peer teaching observation program and a monthly pedagogy reading group, not every instruction librarian participated, but about two-thirds of them did. The instruction coordinator is very understanding and has adopted an attitude of "participate where you can," which sustains a positive environment.

# Marketing

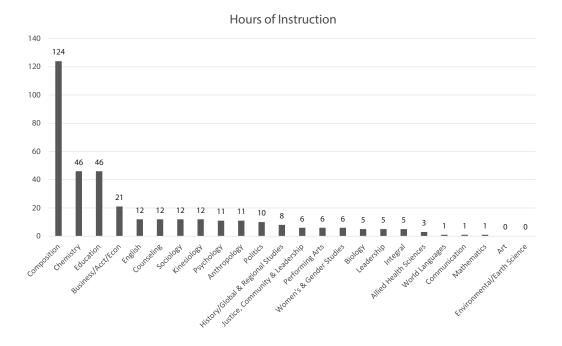
Library instruction within a course can come about in many ways: some initiatives are programmatic, such as when the education department conducted a program-wide review and requested instruction in response to information literacy gaps it discovered. Other instances occur more serendipitously through instructor word of mouth. While established relationships thrive due to SMC Library's high staff retention, a wave of recent retirements has resulted in a few recent hires, which have sparked additional opportunities through SMC's conversational culture.

Librarians often build upon established instruction patterns (going into similar classes each year) and relationships (working with the same faculty each year). While we are always trying to build new bridges, we also value and regularly try to improve upon long-standing instruction partnerships. Our initiatives to increase library instruction have

been successful in a number of departments. Our main goal at this point is not to just increase instruction—many librarians already have full instruction calendars—but to more carefully target focused IL instruction.

### Collaboration

We teach approximately 300 one-shots (with the occasional two-shot or three-shot) each year. Our partnerships with certain departments are stronger than others (see figure 16.4). This disparity is a result of the Core Curriculum's information literacy requirements in certain classes, the importance of library research to certain disciplines' curriculum and faculty, and the relationships with faculty that librarians have built over years (or decades in some cases). Often, these relationships are between a librarian and particular faculty members, rather than a librarian and a department. So when faculty members retire or a research-intensive class rotates between different instructors, the librarian usually has to put in effort to establish new relationships, understand professors' differing goals, and work with instructors to negotiate how students will meet the information literacy learning outcomes and how the librarian and instructor will collaborate.



**Figure 16.4** Number of hours of library instruction time by department in 2017–18.

The largest portion of our library sessions is for the composition program, which generally collaborates closely with the library, and a librarian serves on the Composition Program Committee. However, the program is led by a rotating directorship, which means

the instruction coordinator must build a new relationship every two years. Most of these classes are taught by adjunct faculty, and while they each design their own class themes and research essay requirements, they are generally enthusiastic about library instruction and flexible in partnering with a librarian.

Following English composition, the chemistry department receives the most instruction time, thanks to the science librarian being fully embedded in that major's Writing in the Disciplines class. The education librarian also teaches multiple sections in many courses, resulting in high instruction time for the education program as well.

Outside of academic departments, SMC Library partners with Student Life offices (including New Student and Family Programs, Career and Professional Development Services, the Intercultural Center, and the Center for Writing across the Curriculum). Librarians meet with these offices regularly to discuss shared goals for student success, support each other's programs, and, occasionally, weave information literacy into their programs, such as career workshops or orientation leader trainings.

### **Assessment**

Currently, the instruction coordinator encourages assessment of student learning by sharing and discussing classroom assessment techniques (minute papers, using PollEverywhere to check in throughout class, etc.), but ultimately assessment of a session is left up to the librarian, and we have never collated classroom assessment data to look at it holistically.

However, librarians have done some formal and informal assessments of student essays, including a study for ACRL's Assessment in Action project that compared the effect of two different approaches to one-shots on student research essays.8 Librarians have also been included in carrying out assessments conducted by faculty partners on campus. We hope to organize larger-scale assessments of what information literacy skills SMC students are learning, but planning for this is ongoing.

Librarians, though classified as staff, sit on a variety of faculty curriculum committees tasked with assessment. Academic departments undergo a review every four years, and a portion of these reviews involves the librarian reviewing syllabi and research assignments to recommend additional library instruction and collection materials.

### Role of the One-Shot

The one-shot is the instruction program's main source of sustenance. In composition classes, a one-shot is required; in Writing in the Disciplines classes, one is encouraged; and in many others, faculty who assign research projects are offered one or request one. Some classes take more of an embedded-librarian model, and the faculty who regularly teach those courses have become our strongest allies.

In 2016, we ran an analysis of what classes each student had taken during their time at SMC and which of those course sections had library instruction. We found that students were receiving anywhere from one to eleven one-shots at SMC, with an average of 4.4.9 While we are proud of our instruction program's popularity, we are concerned that undergraduate students are receiving one-shots without scaffolding. Since they receive one-shots

in a variety of departments and may not take their major courses in a designated order, we can't assume a common skill set among the students in a class. Students sometimes express that they've "had the library class before," implying that every class is the same. Librarians would like to partner with departments to more carefully scaffold the teaching of research skills within and across classes and also to make room for critical information literacy practices and dispositions that may be unrelated to a particular assignment. We recently began detailed curriculum mapping across the departments to inform our conversations. We are also challenging ourselves to incorporate more differentiated instruction to accommodate students of different skill levels and engage more advanced students in teaching their peers.

Our graduate and professional programs have highly structured curricula, which makes scaffolding easier. In education programs, a librarian is embedded in the key research courses for students completing master's theses and doctoral dissertations. Many other graduate programs, primarily in business, incorporate librarians through one-shots, though with the adoption of new programs and courses, opportunities for collaboration are arising all the time.

### **Pedagogical Highlights**

What we teach is guided by our institutional information literacy learning outcomes (see Program Scope), which were based on the retired *Information Literacy Competency* Standards for Higher Education, but our lessons also incorporate the ideas of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.<sup>10</sup> For example, we teach a library session for an English 5 class in which students are researching topics related to the personal history of a family or community member. In this class, we teach to and assess the Core Curriculum learning outcome "Students will develop search strategies and use library catalogs and databases to find relevant material," but our framing of the class conversations and activities is shaped by Framework knowledge practices such as "define different types of authority, such as subject expertise (e.g., scholarship), societal position (e.g., public office or title), or special experience (e.g., participating in a historic event)."11 We might do this by examining the question of who gets to write history and the value of considering primary, secondary, and tertiary sources from those in positions of varying power. We might also address the *Framework*'s dispositions, like "Learners . . . persist in the face of search challenges, and know when they have enough information to complete the information task,"12 acknowledging to our students that research is challenging and requires persistence and knowing when to get help.

Our librarians share a teaching philosophy that strives to meet students where they are and then work to build upon those skills. We tend to use hands-on, active-learning activities in class that allow students to practice the skills they will actually need to succeed on their assignment and to be successful throughout their time at SMC and beyond. In line with SMC's mission, we have committed to incorporating social justice concepts whenever possible. To be effective, librarians must teach compassionately without the benefit of previous rapport with a student and sometimes without exact knowledge of the research assignment. The Instruction and Outreach Coordinator and instruction librarians have made great strides in focusing professional development on teaching skills and classroom

management, including starting a pedagogy reading group for librarians and fostering transparent communication around teaching challenges.

# Administrative Highlights

Teaching librarians share nearly all lesson plans in a shared folder on Google Drive; this practice helps us learn from each other, preserves institutional knowledge of past teaching practices when there is a new liaison, and serves us in emergencies when a librarian needs a substitute. This practice required some adjustments for librarians who wrote out lesson plans by hand or were uncomfortable with Google Drive, but we have achieved almost complete participation.

# Information Literacy Coordinator **Profile**

At SMC Library, the Instruction and Outreach Coordinator role is a set of responsibilities that are added onto a librarian's existing position. For example, the current Instruction and Outreach Coordinator was already coordinating first-year programs and serving as the librarian for the English department when she was also named Instruction and Outreach Coordinator by the dean. The Instruction and Outreach Coordinator role does not rotate; the coordinator remains in that role indefinitely.

Overall, the coordinator is responsible for managing the instruction team, functioning as a liaison and teaching librarian (with collection development duties), maintaining an active calendar of outreach events, and, with the help of a part-time instruction librarian, doing library instruction for the many composition courses.

# What We Wish People Knew

Coordinating instruction is a job of contradictions. Here, as at many other libraries, it involves taking responsibility for a program's quality while having no actual supervisory role.<sup>13</sup> In our library, most librarians do instruction as part of their liaison responsibilities, but they all have additional responsibilities. So while the librarians are impressively committed to teaching, instruction is a higher priority for some of us, and less so for those with a smaller instruction emphasis in their job descriptions. Consequently, the Instruction and Outreach Coordinator must focus on using influence and persuasion to encourage participation in instruction team professional development opportunities.

Similarly, the role requires keeping up on small-scale tasks, like making sure broken things in the library classroom get fixed, but also big-picture thinking, like trying to quantify our impact on the entire undergraduate and graduate student population. It includes very public-facing responsibilities, like representing the library at campus events, but also hidden labor, like nudging the team to accomplish set goals or serving as an ear for fellow librarians' teaching struggles. Being a leader in an academic library while still learning how to teach effectively can lead to impostor syndrome. 14 Veronica Arellano Douglas and Joanna Gadsby have connected the supportive, relational, and "housework" aspects of coordination to gendered expectations of instruction coordination.<sup>15</sup>

While it is important to be mindful of the stresses and hidden labor that go into coordinating library instruction, the role also involves many rewards. We have a thriving one-shot program that is extremely popular with faculty and reaches almost every single one of our students (often multiple times). Our teaching librarians make up a collegial team that is interested in innovating and committed to effective pedagogy. Long-term librarians bring a wealth of institutional knowledge, while new team members bring best practices and fresh ideas from other institutions. We see the college's Catholic, Lasallian, and liberal arts identities as aligning with the library profession's own values, such as those of social justice, democracy, and lifelong learning. While we progress toward goals involving assessment, scaffolding, and ensuring the sustainability of our teaching efforts, we have a supportive dean and an optimistic, hardworking team. It is an invigorating challenge, filled with small victories and proud moments, sending the team down these paths.

#### **Notes**

- 1. Lasallian schools are based in the mission of John Baptist De La Salle, who founded in France in 1680 the community of teachers that became known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Today, the Christian Brothers run 1,000 educational institutions around the world, including six institutions of higher education in the United States, founded in the Lasallian Core Principles of "quality education," "respect for all persons," "inclusive community," "concern for the poor and social justice," and "faith in the presence of God." La Salle RELAN, Christian Brothers Conference, https://www.lasallian.info, accessed January 25, 2019.
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- 4. "HACU Member Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)," Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, accessed January 25, 2019. https://www.hacu.net/assnfe/CompanyDirectory.asp?STYLE=2&COMPANY\_TYPE=1%2C5.
- 5. "Facts & Figures."
- 6. The core curriculum requires students to take specified numbers of courses that address various "habits of mind" or "pathways to knowledge" or that involve "engaging the world." It also requires students to take classes in composition, including a Writing in the Disciplines class in their major, as well as in SMC's signature programs, January Term and Collegiate Seminar.
- 7. For example, see Fiona Hunt and Jane Birks. "Best Practices in Information Literacy," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (January 2004): 27–39, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2004.0010; Maya Hobscheid, "From Instruction to Instructional Design: Scalable Approaches to Information Literacy," in Conference Proceedings, CARL Conference, San Francisco, CA, April 13–15, 2018, http://conf2018.carl-acrl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/hobscheid\_engaging\_scalableinfolit.pdf.
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- 11. Association of College and Research Libraries, Framework, 4.
- 12. Association of College and Research Libraries, Framework, 9.
- 13. Candice M. Benjes-Small and Rebecca K. Miller, *The New Instruction Librarian* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2017), 144–55.
- 14. Melanie Clark, Kimberly Vardeman, and Shelley Barba, "Perceived Inadequacy: A Study of the Imposter Phenomenon among College and Research Librarians," *College and Research Libraries* 75, no. 3 (2014): 255–71, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl12-423.
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