Providing the "Right" Instructional Development Opportunities

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By establishing instructional skill improvement and professional development opportunities for librarians, libraries better position themselves to meet the rapidly changing needs of students and the university curriculum. Distinguishing what programs and support materials will be most useful and attractive to instruction librarians can prove difficult, but it is crucial to identify the actual needs in order to target development efforts and prevent wasted time and resources. Below, the authors discuss the steps taken at the University of Colorado (CU) at Boulder Libraries to ensure any resources and tools created will provide relevant and useful support to the librarians and staff who provide instruction to the campus community.

Current Instruction Program

The CU-Boulder University Libraries strive to establish strong information literacy initiatives and instructional opportunities that enhance campus scholarship and learning. As stated in the libraries' *Statement on Information Literacy*:

> "Our mission is to help members of the campus community develop their conceptual understanding of information and information sources, as well as obtain information retrieval and analysis skills appropriate for their individual levels of scholarship and research needs."

In an effort to meet this end, the instruction program is conducted in a three-tiered approach.

- course integrated information literacy program with the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR)
- individual one-time instruction sessions
- credit course offerings

The University Libraries is composed of five branches and one main library. Librarians and staff from all libraries and three graduate students with the Program for Writing and Rhetoric provide library instruction. Administration of the Libraries' instructional program is dispersed across campus libraries, amongst instruction librarians, and throughout library departments. The central Reference and Instructional Services department serves the PWR collaboration, and many fields in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Branch libraries and subject bibliographers support instructional needs of the sciences, music, business, engineering and numerous other campus departments and programs.

Challenges Facing Instruction Librarians at CU

While CU Libraries instruction requests for 2006-2007 academic year increased 50% over the previous year and campus feedback on our instruction program is very positive, there are numerous elements impacting the programming, outcomes, and sustainability of librarians' instructional efforts.   The Libraries' drive to encourage information literate graduates is essential to campus success; therefore, devising strategies for improvement and support of the instruction skills of CU librarians is greatly warranted.

To fully assess instruction librarians' needs, a comprehensive understanding of the libraries and librarian limitations is essential.   The first vital element is staffing, which is challenged by issues of competing job responsibilities, subject expertise, and professional training. Most instruction librarians are in positions with other duties and responsibilities that weigh more heavily than instruction. There are varying degrees of teaching loads based on job responsibilities. These factors may affect the amount of time individual librarians have available for keeping current with the literature related to instruction and information literacy. Also, subject bibliographers and liaisons may be responsible for disciplines or departments that fall beyond their established subject expertise or background. And finally, many librarians completed Library Science programs that did not include coursework in instruction, classroom pedagogy, or teaching strategies. Those who enter the field of librarianship are not all motivated by a personal drive to teach and may in fact be quite uncomfortable with the prospect of teaching.

Other factors include the degree of autonomy one has in preparing each session. For example, CU's established first year writing library seminar has outlined objectives and a lesson plan. However, beyond those sessions, librarians have the freedom to adjust content and delivery

of instruction to individual styles and specific class needs. While this is beneficial in most instances, the need for the librarian to learn a variety of resources tailored to every session can be time consuming, and it can be difficult to design a one-shot session that creates an interactive and engaging learning environment and also meets information literacy goals put forth in the Libraries' *Statement on Information Literacy*. Recognizing all of these factors and stresses on instruction planning, the authors began to investigate potential models of collaboration and resource sharing.

Current Instructional Support

The University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries is extremely active in its instructional programs to support the campus curriculum and student needs. However, the authors identified the absence of strong support mechanisms for librarians with instructional responsibilities. A number of initial tools had been developed based on perceived need, rather than actual needs, of librarians at CU.

- An instruction blog provides links to articles, web resources, news stories, wikis and other resources that may be interesting and beneficial to librarians planning instruction sessions.

- An online repository allows librarians to share resources (lesson plans, handouts, PowerPoint presentations) they create with others.

- A communally accessible RefWorks bibliographic management database includes articles on many topics relevant to instruction librarians, including information literacy, millennial students, and more.

- A physical library of the printed articles listed in the RefWorks database was produced in parallel and resides in the Reference and Instructional Services department. In addition to the printed articles, a print-based "Working Tools" library of texts related to library instruction was formed. This set of texts is housed outside of the circulating collection to allow librarians ready access to materials to aid their instruction planning.

- And finally, a discussion group was created to allow librarians to meet over lunch to discuss both their instruction experiences and trends in the literature to help encourage awareness of both local and external practices in instruction.

These resources were created with the goal of helping librarians with their instruction duties, but they have been

little used. There is little interactivity on the blog, and only a small portion of librarians used the materials repository. Since the creation and promotion of the RefWorks database in May 2006, there have been 37 logins, and only two logged uses of the physical article library. Use of the physical volumes in the "Working Tools" library has been similarly low. The discussion group was well-attended at first but it was put on hiatus when attendance began to dwindle.

In order to figure out where the disconnect is between the needs of the instruction librarians at CU and the previously developed resources, the authors sent out a survey asking librarians for a description of their instruction responsibilities, their current practices related to instruction, and their instructional support needs. The survey was sent to 25 librarians and staff from all libraries on the CU-Boulder campus that are responsible for instruction. The survey response rate was quite good at 76% percent.

For the majority of survey respondents, instruction is not the dominant aspect of their job. Sixty-three percent indicated that instruction was between 10-30% of their workload, and 53% reported that instruction is a secondary job responsibility. Eighty-four percent of participants said they taught between zero and 20 classes per semester. Respondents said they spent anywhere from 30 minutes to 16 hours preparing for a class, with many indicating that the amount of preparation time depends on the individual class, whether or not they'd covered the material or resources before, and their familiarity with the discipline.

When asked about their current instructional development, respondents indicated that learning from the experiences of other instruction librarians was most important. Respondents ranked where they received the most information about instruction, and they chose their colleagues as their most frequent resource, followed by journal articles, conferences, blogs and then wikis. Seventy-four percent of participants said they "sometimes" consulted materials created by another librarian or institution when preparing for a class. A small number of librarians (21%) reported reading instruction-related literature on a weekly basis, with the rest indicating that they reviewed the literature either monthly or a few times per year. For instruction-related blogs and wikis, 26% cited that they visited them on a regular basis, and only 5% indicated

dents' minds as the home of frustrating, useless busy-work. It is our hope that by working with emerging professors we may help foster engaging and thoughtful practice in regards to creating the library assignment as well as foster good will with these GTAs so that they seek out their librarian colleagues when they eventually reach their own academic institution to take their place at the front of the classroom.

Overview and example assignments are available on the workshop home page:

http://www.libs.uga.edu/ref/grsc7770/.

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that they actively contributed to instruction related blogs. Other resources mentioned for class preparation included colleagues at other institutions, experience teaching in other disciplines, literature from other fields (especially education), instructors and assignments for the classes they are teaching, and list-servs, resource directories, and books.

While many of the respondents were satisfied with the instructional support that was currently available to them, such as the informal help from their CU colleagues, a greater interest in interactive, in-person resources came through in the survey answers. Everyone who completed the survey said they were interested in more collaboration and discussion with other librarians; 79% said they'd be interested in a discussion group that shared literature and experiences. Respondents reported that they'd like to see other resources developed like workshops (on topics like assessment, technology, and active learning), and organized discussions on the mechanics or "how" of library instruction, including individual experiences and tools used. When asked why they would or would not use the resources that were previously developed, the answers addressed general themes of time constraints; many indicated that discussions focused on practical classroom strategies, as opposed to just generally discussing trends, would be preferable because they lacked the time to read articles or monographs and they would benefit more from a casual discussion that may inform and inspire their own instruction preparation.

Next Steps for the Instruction Program

The results of the survey showed that discussions focused on current instruction practices and brainstorming ideas, as well as targeted skill-development work-

shops on topics related to instruction, would best suit the time-strapped librarians and staff at the CU-Boulder Libraries. It became apparent that some instructional support tools will be more readily used than others. Based on this feedback, it would be advantageous to spend more time and energy developing structured workshop and discussion sessions that provide overviews of alternative teaching methods combined with a discussion element to encourage the development of new ideas and skills.

The survey illustrated the need to fully understand the actual needs in order to spend the resources and time available to create relevant support mechanisms, rather than resources that appear to be valuable and end up seldom used. Since most librarians and staff have primary responsibilities other than instruction, making the resources easy-to-use and pertinent to their job duties is vitally important. Crucial to the future success of the instructional support program will be buy-in and participation by the other librarians and staff at the institution. Informal feedback after the survey indicated that most people are excited, so now the goal is to capture that excitement and momentum by setting up a new, more focused instructional support program soon.

The next steps will be for the authors to draft a concrete and developed plan to support on-going workshops and discussions. The authors will initiate the change by establishing three annual instruction discussions strategically placed before and after semesters. Continued development of collaborative interaction and conversation will ideally impact the overall effectiveness of the University Libraries instructional programming as the authors continue to mold instructional support resources based not on just hunches or the latest trend, but on the survey's results.