

The Quarterly Interview: Sarah LeMire

Texas A&M University

-Edited Transcript-

LOEX: *Where do you work? What is your job title and what are your main responsibilities?*

LeMire: I am the First Year Programs Coordinator at the Texas A&M University Libraries in College Station, TX, and I've been there for about three and a half years. My primary focus is on first-year students, including both first-time-in-college students and transfer students. I coordinate and teach information literacy for these students, particularly in first-year core curriculum writing courses. I also coordinate our outreach efforts to first-year students. We're a very large university (60,000+ students on the College Station campus), and we do a lot of large-scale outreach to help orient students to the library and to try to help them feel welcome and engaged.

You served in the military and, after five years including serving overseas, were honorably discharged. What made you decide to go to get your MSI and become a librarian? Did you find you had any particular advantages or disadvantages based on your background?

Yes, I'm a proud U.S. Army veteran, and in many ways my library career is a result of my military service. I was a first-generation college student and I was responsible for paying my own way through college, which I did in part by working in libraries. I had worked in libraries in both high school and college and I thought I wanted to continue on to become a librarian, but I knew that there was no way I could afford to pay for graduate school. So I joined the Army and afterwards was able to use the G.I. Bill for library school.

My military experience comes in handy, especially at Texas A&M. Texas A&M is a Senior Military College and it also enrolls a large number of military veterans, service members, and military family members each year. In addition to my focus on first-year students, I also carve out time to pay special attention to student veterans. I do mention my military service to students on occasion, as it causes them to take a second look at me and seems to push against their expectations of who librarians are and what experiences we bring to the table.

You have done a lot of work in the area of curriculum mapping. What are 1-2 of the primary elements of curriculum mapping that are necessary to develop a cohesive instruction program map?

There are a number of important elements to a cohesive curriculum map, but the two that immediately come to

mind are data and buy-in. Those two elements are really critical to not only create a map, but to create a map that will be used.

Data is critical to assessing and mapping your instruction program, your college or university's curriculum, or how the two intertwine. Many libraries already collect routine instruction data. At our institution, we routinely recorded the number of instruction sessions we were teaching, the classes we were teaching them in, and how many students were in each session. But we found through the process of curriculum mapping that there was other data that we should be collecting. What are we teaching in each class? We need to record learning outcomes in order to answer that question. How often are we seeing students? We need to think more broadly about the types of interactions we have with students, and specifically we need to include outreach activities in our curriculum map along with information literacy instruction. Who are we seeing (and not seeing)? We need to record more demographic data to answer that question, especially for outreach. We came across all of these questions through the curriculum mapping process, and made changes to our instruction statistics database so we could begin to record relevant data such as an outreach presentation to a specific demographic, such as student veterans.

The other primary element is buy-in. I have developed curriculum maps for my own program areas and I find those maps very helpful for thinking strategically about my own work and facilitating conversations with colleagues inside and outside the library. But my work doesn't occur in a vacuum, and first-year programs are inextricably intertwined with library liaison work and other library programming. An approach to curriculum mapping that investigates the gaps and overlaps between my work and that of my colleagues will have broader implications for our instruction program. In order to create, learn from, and make changes based on that broader curriculum map, buy-in from colleagues is absolutely critical. A great way to build buy-in and therefore extend the impact of a curriculum mapping project is by collaborating with colleagues to think through the questions you have about your instruction program and then to investigate those questions together using curriculum mapping.

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What are a couple of the most common mistakes or biggest pitfalls that you see librarians make regarding curriculum mapping?

I think one of the hardest pitfalls to avoid with curriculum mapping, at least for me, is to accept the limitations of the method. It's really easy to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We want to wait until we have all of the data, until we can answer all of the questions, and until the curriculum is done shifting and changing. But the reality is you'll never have all of the data you could use, there will always be other questions you want to answer, and the curriculum will never stop changing. I think it's important to accept that a curriculum map is really a quick snapshot of what is happening at your institution – and that snapshot can be really valuable! It can help you start to figure out whether you're actually doing what you think you're doing with your instruction program, and where major gaps and overlaps might be. It's not going to answer all of the questions, and indeed it may lead to more questions than you had at the start. But it's a really good place to start thinking critically about how your instruction program is operating. And while curriculum maps do become out of date quickly, the process of thinking critically and strategically about instruction is one that never ends – it's ongoing work just by its nature.

You co-wrote the book, *Serving Those Who Served: Librarian's Guide to Working with Veteran and Military Communities (2017)*. What type of library instruction programming have you found is most successful with veterans and military-affiliated patrons?

Serving Those Who Served is intended to be a starting point for librarians from all types of libraries to start thinking about how to engage with their veteran and military-affiliated patrons. Some of those ways are, of course, library instruction and outreach. Some colleges and universities do have veteran-specific courses where librarians can engage directly with student veterans, and when I am in an environment with a whole group, I find it very useful to identify as a veteran, employ the occasional bit of common military jargon, to connect with prior knowledge by using familiar military examples. These types of choices allow me to signal to the student veterans that I'm able and willing to engage with them on the familiar ground of the military, which then helps me make connections between their prior knowledge from the military and the information literacy instruction. If I don't know if a class has veterans or perhaps there is only one or two, I might just identify myself as a veteran during my introduction. That often leads to a question or a quick chat after class

about military service, which I consider evidence of the rapport and relationship building I am striving for with the student veteran population.

I also do a lot of outreach to student veterans, because they tend to be quite a bit different than other first-year students at my campus. I know from personal experience that student veterans can experience a lot of barriers to retention and completion. For example, they tend to be coming to higher education after a break in their education, and they are often working and taking care of families. Despite, or perhaps because of, these factors, student veterans tend to be very motivated and goal-oriented in their educational pursuits. I work closely with our campus veterans center to help student veterans learn about the types of spaces, services, and resources available in a research library like Texas A&M's and how the library can contribute to their academic success.

Another group with whom you have worked in your role as FYE and Outreach Librarian is Texas A&M's Honors College. What do you do with them, and what particular challenges and/or opportunities have you found with this group?

Texas A&M's University Honors Program is one of our strongest first-year programming partners. For the last few years, we have partnered with them on a three-part information literacy program. We do an information literacy pre-assessment, followed by information literacy instruction sessions and then a rubric-based assessment of authentic student artifacts for all of the incoming Honors students. This is a major endeavor that takes about a dozen librarians from a variety of subject backgrounds. It's also a lot of fun! Our librarians get an opportunity to meet with a highly engaged group of students from a variety of academic disciplines. We also have the chance to really investigate students' skills in writing research papers in each of our liaison areas, which is a great perspective-taking activity, especially for librarians who often teach upper-division and graduate students.

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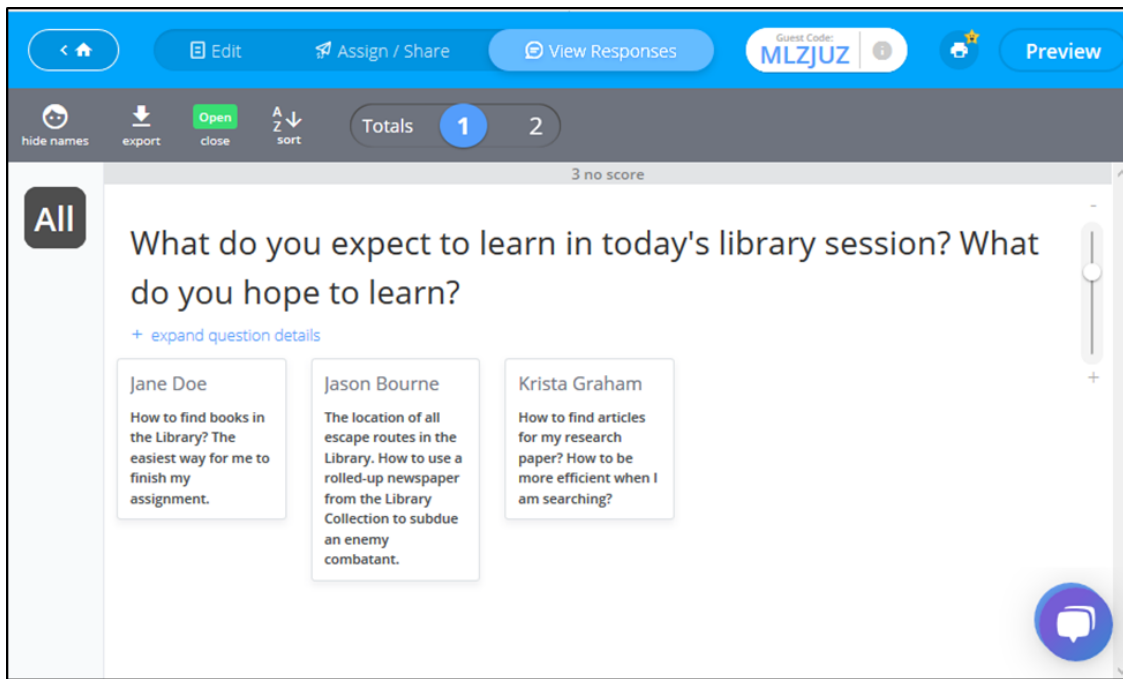
tial credit for a wrong answer, if you so choose, by clicking on their answer and using the slider next to the points score. When your grading is complete, you can use the “export” option to download student responses and scores into a spreadsheet application such as Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets.

Conclusion

Formative assessment can be a very effective tool in addressing some of the challenges inherent in library instruction. When thoughtfully deployed these techniques can allow librarians to quickly gather and use data to

make meaningful improvements to student learning. Because of their nature, instructors can easily incorporate formative assessments into active learning activities and then use the results to guide their teaching approach throughout the remainder of a session. Although certainly not required to conduct this type of assessment, digital tools such as “Formative” can simplify the process of designing and administering assessments, viewing and using the gathered data, and engaging students in learning. Try it, and I think you will find it a useful tool for incorporating regular assessment activities into your library instruction.

Figure 2:
Viewing student responses to Question 1 for a two-question assessment.



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What books or articles have influenced you?

L. Dee Fink’s *Creating Significant Learning Experiences, 2nd Edition*.

- My very first week as a librarian, I was sent to meet with a colleague, the amazing Donna Ziegenfuss at the University of Utah, to learn about Fink and backward design. It’s been instrumental to my instruction and outreach work ever since.

Safiya Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression*.

- I first encountered Safiya Noble’s powerful and important work at ACRL back in 2015, and I so wish I had encountered her earlier. I refer to her work pretty much every time I teach.

Carol Kuhlthau’s work on the Information Search Process

- I still remember having a bit of a breakthrough moment when reading Kuhlthau for the first time. Kuhlthau’s exploration of the affective aspects of information searching really resonated with me, and it’s what draws me to information literacy instruction and outreach.