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The Claremont Colleges Library: Instruction in a Consortium

Rebecca Halpern

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Chapter 23

The Claremont Colleges Library

Instruction in a Consortium

Rebecca Halpern

Population Served

The Claremont Colleges Library (TCCL) is unusual in that it is a central library that serves seven independent, private liberal arts colleges known collectively as the Claremont Colleges and colloquially as The 7Cs. The 7Cs are composed of five undergraduate colleges (colloquially known as The 5Cs)—Pomona College, Scripps College, Pitzer College, Harvey Mudd College, and Claremont McKenna College—and two graduate institutions—Claremont Graduate University and Keck Graduate Institute. We are located in Claremont, California, approximately thirty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. The colleges physically adjoin each other, totaling about one square mile in size. All 7Cs are private, predominately white institutions. Six of the seven of the colleges are liberal arts colleges, while Keck Graduate Institute is dedicated entirely to applied health sciences. While the colleges operate independently, many student services, such as the health center, are administered consortially under The Claremont Colleges Services (TCCS); TCCL is a member of TCCS. In total, the seven Claremont Colleges serve approximately 7,700 students. The demographic makeup of students across the campuses is fairly similar. Nearly all students live on or near campus. On average, international students make up approximately 10 percent of undergraduate students. There is a small population of transfer students.

Because TCCL serves all 7Cs, the complexity of the organization greatly influences the instruction program. Most curricular programs are independently run through each college, meaning a biology student at Pitzer may have a very different set of course requirements and degree path than a biology student at Pomona. The impact of this is discussed in greater detail below, but in general, the consortial nature of the library requires us to be as strategic and transparent as possible.

Program Scope

Instruction at TCCL is generally grouped into two types: first-year instruction and subject-integrated instruction. First-year instruction comprises around 40 percent of all instruction and about 100 sessions a year. Subject-integrated instruction comprises around 50 percent of all instruction and about 150 sessions a year. The remaining 10 percent takes place outside of the primary instruction division, such as special collections instruction or instruction on digital scholarship tools.

TCCL has a shared pedagogical framework called Habits of Mind that we use to guide all instruction sessions.¹ First adopted in 2013, the Habits of Mind provide an overall framework for student learning aimed at preparing students to become confident researchers and critical thinkers who contribute to thriving communities of practice through the lifelong cultivation of information literacy Habits of Mind. The five Habits are inquiry, evaluation, communication, attribution, and insight. When first adopted, each Habit had associated learning outcomes, differentiated by first-year and capstone years. Over the years, the specific outcomes for each Habit have been revised and in 2017 were condensed to no longer be differentiated by year. However, we are now seeing the benefit of that differentiation and working to differentiate those outcomes once again.

Prior to a library session, librarians are strongly encouraged to have a meeting with the faculty member who requested the instruction session to discuss the course, research assignment, Habits of Mind and associated learning outcomes, and the type of collaboration that makes the most sense. We collaborate with faculty in several ways, including teaching a traditional in-class librarian-facilitated workshop, consulting on research assignments to make them more transparent and accessible for students, developing a course guide or other self-paced learning object, or providing information literacy activities that faculty can lead in class throughout the semester.

Because subject-integrated instruction is not administered programmatically—that is, subject librarians have the freedom to decide which classes are the best candidates for information literacy integration and to assign learning outcomes appropriate for those classes—this chapter focuses on our first-year instruction program. Each of the five undergraduate colleges (the 5Cs) requires a first-year seminar of all first-year and transfer students; the seminar is taken either in their first or second semester (the small number of transfer students are required to take a first-year seminar in their first or second semester at the college). While each college has its own course titles, programmatic goals, assignments, and student learning outcomes, all of the first-year seminars serve to introduce students to college-level writing and research. TCCL's instruction program is well integrated into these seminars. In the 2017–18 school year, 87 percent of first-year seminars had at least one information literacy session led by an instruction librarian. Because each college designs these seminars differently, and because individual section instructors can design their research assignment however they like, the instruction program does not have a shared lesson plan or learning outcomes for our information literacy sessions. Instead, we tailor each session to the specific needs and assignments for that course section and align those needs to our Habits of Mind outcomes.

In addition to in-class instruction, TCCL created two asynchronous, self-paced tutorials to orient and introduce students to research: Start Your Research (SYR) and Exploring Academic Integrity (EAI). We often use SYR as a pre-session activity for students or in lieu

of an in-class session when the learning outcomes of the course don't necessitate one, such as when the assignment doesn't require outside sources. EAI is used in similar ways and is required for all incoming students of Claremont McKenna College and as a remediation of academic integrity infractions at Claremont Graduate University. In the 2018–19 academic year, these tutorials will undergo substantial revisions to content and functionality to better align with the Habits of Mind and the changing needs of the colleges.

Operations

The Claremont Colleges Library has, at the time of writing, twenty-six librarians, thirty-one staff, and seventy-two student employees divided among five divisions: User Services and Resource Sharing; Cataloging and Technical Services; Digital Strategies and Scholarship; Special Collections; and Research, Teaching, and Learning Services (RTLs), which is where the instruction program is located.² Each division has a director who reports to the Dean of the Library.

All librarians at TCCL are classified as staff and do not have any requirements for publication or research. The Director of RTLs supervises seven subject librarians (three arts and humanities, two STEM, one social science, and one interdisciplinary studies), a Scholarly Communications Coordinator, and the Undergraduate Engagement Team Leader. The Scholarly Communications Coordinator, the director, and I serve as the leadership group for RTLs (within TCCL, coordinator and team leader roles are considered middle management and have leadership or supervisory responsibilities). The leadership group sets strategic priorities, develops professional development opportunities, and plans and facilitates our monthly division meetings. As the Undergraduate Engagement Team Leader, I supervise two Teaching and Outreach Librarians and one administrative support staff position. The Undergraduate Engagement Team (UET) is comprised of the Teaching and Outreach Librarians and one support staff member. The UET oversees the first-year instruction program, cocurricular and extracurricular outreach, and research support services. UET members, including me, teach about 80 percent of all first-year seminar library sessions, with the remaining 20 percent divided among the subject librarians, the Scholarly Communications Coordinator, and the three instruction librarians in the Special Collections division (see more on this in the Administrative Highlights section). All RTLs librarians provide research support in the form of one-on-one research consultation appointments. In addition to subject-integrated instruction, subject librarians are also responsible for collection management and outreach to their academic departments.

Marketing

For the first-year instruction program, I market library instruction through each of the first-year seminar coordinators at the 5Cs. Early in the summer, I reach out to the faculty course leads via email, reminding them of our long-standing partnership and asking if I can make a presentation at their instruction retreats or send along any information about our program. In those presentations, I give an overview of our instruction program, talk about our library's Habits of Mind, facilitate a discussion about challenges of research for first-year students, and give examples of different ways we can collaborate with a course.

Subject librarians market instruction through departmental email discussion lists, attendance at faculty meetings, and existing (and in some cases long-standing) relationships with faculty who then recommend library instruction to their colleagues.

Collaboration

In addition to the first-year seminar faculty, our biggest ally on campus is the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), a consortial center for teaching-specific faculty development for all 7Cs. Both I and the director of RTLs serve on CTL's advisory board, where we set priorities for the year. Through our partnership with CTL, I've led several workshops on designing effective research assignments. These hour-long workshops are marketed through representatives from each campus on the board, who communicate what's going on in CTL with our campus communities through email discussion lists and faculty meetings. Our positions on CTL's board also keep us apprised of what's going on at all the campuses, where the teaching priorities are, and any changes to curricula that may impact our program, such as Scripps College revising how to distribute writing classes throughout the curriculum. My being an active participant in our faculty development center helps position librarians as educators and partners in teaching, which affords us credibility we might otherwise not have, not being faculty members ourselves.

Teaching librarians also connect with CTL by attending workshops, participating in CTL's book clubs, and communicating with library staff about CTL events, all of which help maintain this great relationship.

Assessment

From 2012 to 2014, there was active assessment of instruction in various forms.³ Since then, due to staffing changes and reorganizations, no systematic assessment has been in place, and librarians feel overwhelmed at the prospect of assessing the instruction program as a whole. Since coming into my role in 2016, I've focused on rebuilding a critical culture of assessment, grounded in accountability to our mission, reflection on our teaching practices, and transparency in decision-making. Sometimes using those values-based terms instead of the word *assessment* helps reframe assessment from something that can feel punitive to something that is based in our values as educators.

We focus our assessment efforts on in-class, formative assessment that allows us to reflect on and improve our teaching strategies and move toward building a culture of assessment. To that end, each teaching librarian is required to observe one library session a semester and to be observed at one of their own sessions. The observed and observer meet before the library session to talk about the session goals and if the observed would like special attention to anything in particular. During the session, the observer uses a simple double-narrative observation form that we adapted from CTL to keep track of their observations.⁴ A double-narrative form has two columns: observations and reflections intended to help the observer separate observations from reflections and interpretations about those observations. After the session, the pair meets to debrief. The observer can share both the specifics and mechanics of what was observed and offer insight to the instructor about the impact some of those specifics might have on student learning. Our

observation program has led to greater reflection on our teaching practices, sharing of successful active learning and critical pedagogy strategies through a Habits of Mind tool kit, and conversations about what and why we teach.

Pedagogical Highlights

As the Undergraduate Engagement Team Leader, I am responsible for developing a community of practice for all teaching librarians in TCCL. I do this through two primary means: monthly professional development meetings and monthly skillshares (note that this term is generic and not connected to the online learning company of the same name).

The professional development meetings are designed around one theme for the entire semester, and the leadership team plans the curriculum. One especially successful semester had us critically interrogating the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* to understand how it does and does not work for our instructional goals, and ultimately had us revising our Habits of Mind to better reflect the frames.⁵ For example, we modified the language in our Inquiry Habit to better match the language in the Information Has Value frame. Other topics we've covered in these professional development series are microaggressions and inclusive pedagogy and incorporating scholarly communications into information literacy instruction.

Skillshares are an opportunity for all teaching librarians to demonstrate a database, search technique, instruction approach, or new way of thinking for each other. Each semester, I prepare a skillshare calendar where any of the teaching librarians (in RTLS or special collections) can sign up to facilitate a skillshare. While skillshares are informal and are intended to be low-preparation, I do ask that they include specific takeaway, provide cases for when the skill might be needed, and (for pedagogy- or instructional approach-related skillshares) time and resources needed to prepare the technique, possible pitfalls and benefits, and assessment approaches. Generally, skillshares fall into one of two categories: tools and teaching techniques. Some of the tools we've explored are Sage Research Methods Online, Omeka, and NexisUni. For tool-based skillshares, I ask the presenters to share why they chose a specific tool for the class or student population, which Habits of Mind might be reflected through the use of the tool, and any teaching technique that is particularly useful when teaching the tool. Some of the more teaching-specific skillshare topics we've covered are applying Universal Design for Learning principles to our sessions, an introduction to the BEAM model, and how a lesson plan evolves over time.⁶ Regardless of topic, I encourage presenters to reflect candidly about what's worked and what hasn't.

Administrative Highlights

The way I administer our first-year program is quite structured. Each semester, I reach out to the coordinators of all five first-year seminars for a list of their section titles and descriptions. I send that list to all teaching librarians—those in RTLS and our three special collections librarians—and ask them to indicate their preferred classes. During the fall semester, which is our heaviest teaching semester, UET members take about twenty sessions each, and I ask non-UET teaching librarians to take four to six sessions. I ask for preferences instead of assigning classes myself because many of the first-year seminar instructors

have long-standing relationships with librarians and because the first-year program is an opportunity for subject librarians to do instruction for topics outside of their subject areas. I create a Google Sheet that pairs each seminar with a librarian.

Once that's complete, I send an email to each seminar instructor introducing them to their course librarian. I encourage the instructor-librarian pair to schedule a time to meet and remind the instructors that even if they aren't assigning a traditional research paper, the librarian can help them incorporate information literacy skills into their class and direct them to our instruction page of the website that lists our philosophy and session guidelines.

Librarians are expected to enter basic information into a statistics-gathering platform, Springshare's LibWizard, to keep track of how many classes are taught each year. I use that form to keep track of which seminars have library sessions to be able to identify courses or instructors who may need more encouragement to take advantage of our expertise. For those instructors who don't frequently take advantage of instruction sessions, I will invite them out for coffee or lunch to find out more about their classes and assignments to see if there are other opportunities for collaboration.

Information Literacy Coordinator Profile

When I was hired in 2016, it was as the Teaching and Learning Services Coordinator, a formal instruction and reference coordinator role with no direct reports. At that time, all RTLS librarians were subject librarians who reported to the RTLS Director, and my role was to coordinate our instruction efforts by assigning first-year seminar classes, overseeing research support, and developing teaching-focused professional development activities. Since then, as a response to my feedback that first-year instruction was so time-consuming that other responsibilities such as collection development and outreach were neglected, RTLS was restructured to have a dedicated team responsible for first-year instruction and non-curricular outreach: the Undergraduate Engagement Team. The Teaching and Learning Services Coordinator position morphed into the UET Leader position, which still oversees the first-year program and research support, but now supervises the two Teaching and Outreach Librarians and an administrative staff person. In addition, my role now is also formally charged with developing programmatic outreach to targeted student populations and programs.

What I Wish People Knew

I feel much more effective guiding the direction of an instruction program with formal supervisory responsibilities. Overseeing a program without positional authority was challenging and required fine-tuned interpersonal skills. As a coordinator, I needed skills of emotional intelligence, negotiation, relationship and consensus building, and advocacy. In my new role, those skills have proven invaluable, and I have worked on developing more management- and supervisory-specific skills. One important skill is engaging folks with the processes you develop. It isn't enough to have workflows and structure for getting

work done—you also have to help people engage with those structures in order to make them work.

Regardless of supervisory responsibilities, coordinating a program requires unparalleled critical listening skills: you need to be listening to the needs of your students and faculty, to the challenges and opportunities for teaching librarians, and to the direction of information literacy pedagogy at large. Then you have to translate all those needs into a program and get everyone to feel ownership and buy-in—it often feels like an impossible task! Like all near-impossible tasks, asking for help is a must. Who are your allies? Who understands and can help articulate your vision? How can you leverage relationships with those who do have supervisory responsibilities to ensure accountability? It is difficult, emotionally heavy work, but is doable—and even rewarding—with a support network.

Notes

1. “Our Instruction Philosophy,” in “Request an Instruction Session,” The Claremont Colleges Library, last modified August 2018, <https://library.claremont.edu/request-an-instruction-session/#block-2>.
2. “Library Divisions,” Our Organization, The Claremont Colleges Library, last modified March 2018, <https://library.claremont.edu/people>.
3. “Assessment,” The Claremont Colleges Library, last modified September 24, 2014, <http://libraries.claremont.edu/informationliteracy/assessment.asp>.
4. “Multi-campus Teaching Observation Program,” The Claremont Colleges Center for Teaching and Learning, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://teaching.claremont.edu/observation>.
5. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).
6. Joseph Bizup, “BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing,” *Rhetoric Review* 27, no. 1 (2008): 72–86.

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