**Gardner** (*Instruction Librarian / Assistant Professor of Library Science*) University of Wisconsin Superior [Superior, WI] ; **Pittman** (*Reference and Instruction Librarian*) University of Minnesota Duluth [Duluth, MN]

# FROM BAD KARAOKE TO GRAMMY WINNERS: GET YOUR TEAM IN TUNE

## CAROLYN CAFFREY GARDNER AND KIM PITTMAN

## INTRODUCTION

Many studies document the lack of instructional training provided for future librarians enrolled in graduate school. As illustrated by Westbrock and Fabian (2010, 2011), most librarians gain their teaching skills on the job, a finding also supported by Julien and Genius (2011). While many librarians gain instructional training after being hired, a majority of librarians surveyed by Westbrock and Fabian indicated that they believed instruction should have been covered more extensively in library school. Though much of the literature focuses on training programs for new instruction librarians, ongoing training is essential for all librarians who teach. Through varied and continual opportunities for professional development, librarians can expand and develop their teaching skills in a changing educational landscape, despite limited availability of instructional training in library school.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Library instruction coordinators are urged by the Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL) Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators to facilitate in-house, ongoing professional development opportunities for library staff who teach (2007). Library and educational literature offer guiding principles that coordinators can draw on to create a culture that encourages librarians to continually develop their teaching skills. Blase and Blase (2000) provide an overview of instructional leadership, a concept which describes school principals' ability to create a culture of learning and foster teachers' professional growth. Drawing on Blase and Blase, Fowler and Walter (2003) consider instructional leadership in the context of library instruction, and call on library instruction coordinators to reflect on the characteristics, behaviors, and responsibilities of effective instructional leaders in order to successfully take on

leadership roles within their own institutions. Whether professional development is described as the duty of instructional leaders (Saunders, 2011) or instructional improvement (Walter, 2006) authors agree that creating a culture that supports and promotes the growth of teaching librarians is paramount to success and continuous improvement. Practical strategies to create such a culture include: critical self-reflection, peer coaching, discussions about teaching, workshops, conference attendance, and collaboration with campus teaching centers (Walter, 2006).

Drawing on the recommendations and strategies outlined in the literature, the authors, as the instruction coordinators at the University of Wisconsin Superior and the University of Minnesota Duluth, have provided a range of professional development opportunities for teaching librarians, despite limited staff time and resources.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

University of Wisconsin Superior is a small public liberal arts college primarily composed of undergraduates with a total enrollment of approximately 3,000 students. Librarians have faculty status and also teach in a small library science minor. In addition to the instruction coordinator who provides online and in-person instruction, there are three other librarians who do not participate in the library instruction program. The instruction coordinator position is new for the library and increasingly important after a catastrophic flood June 20th, 2012, resulting in the loss of the general collection. Now more than ever, UW Superior's Jim Dan Hill Library is focusing on services librarians provide rather than materials the library has. Since none of the other librarians participate in the instruction program and information literacy is a new job duty, a key library goal is to provide professional development training to help librarians build the confidence necessary to take on a teaching role.

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) is a comprehensive research university with a total enrollment of approximately 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The library instruction program is staffed by eight non-tenure track reference librarians who provide in-person and online instruction to first-year writing courses and liaison departments. Reference librarians have varying levels of teaching experience, pedagogical knowledge, and confidence providing instruction. Although most librarians have five or more years of teaching experience, changing resources, an emphasis on active learning, and the need to support online instruction have all necessitated ongoing instruction-related professional development.

Both UMD and UW Superior are part of larger institutional networks, but our remote geographic locations make it time-consuming and expensive for librarians to attend conferences and workshops. As a result, we have worked in our roles as instruction coordinators to create local professional development opportunities on a limited budget. While our institutional contexts differ, we have been guided in our planning of instruction-related training by similar principles.

## PLANNING

Strategic planning is key to implementing a systematic approach to professional development. In order to gain staff buy-in and administrative support, we both have focused training at our respective institutions on practical topics that staff identified as areas for improvement, respected librarian time constraints, and provided incentives for participation.

We also took steps to identify staff needs and preferences for training. At UW Superior, librarians evaluated their skills using the ACRL Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators by ranking abilities for each proficiency using a Likert scale ranging from "Not Yet" to "Advanced." Individuals were not required to share their results but were instead encouraged to use the rankings to jumpstart a discussion on targeting instructional improvement efforts. At UMD, librarians took a brief survey (Appendix A) which asked them to identify areas for future growth as instructors and describe their preferences for training methods. This bottom-up approach encouraged personal ownership and investment in the professional development programs at both institutions.

While librarians at both institutions are interested in further developing their teaching skills, time constraints and competing professional responsibilities limit the time available for professional development. At both institutions, we have worked around these limitations by scheduling many workshops and training events during the summer, and avoiding the busiest parts of the academic year. At UW Superior, librarians have been encouraged to include their participation in instruction-related training in their retention, tenure, and promotion portfolios. At UMD, the library's Head of Reference Services has provided key support for instruction-related training by making attendance at some training meetings mandatory, and strongly encouraging staff participation in others. At both institutions, food has been a proven incentive for staff attendance at training events.
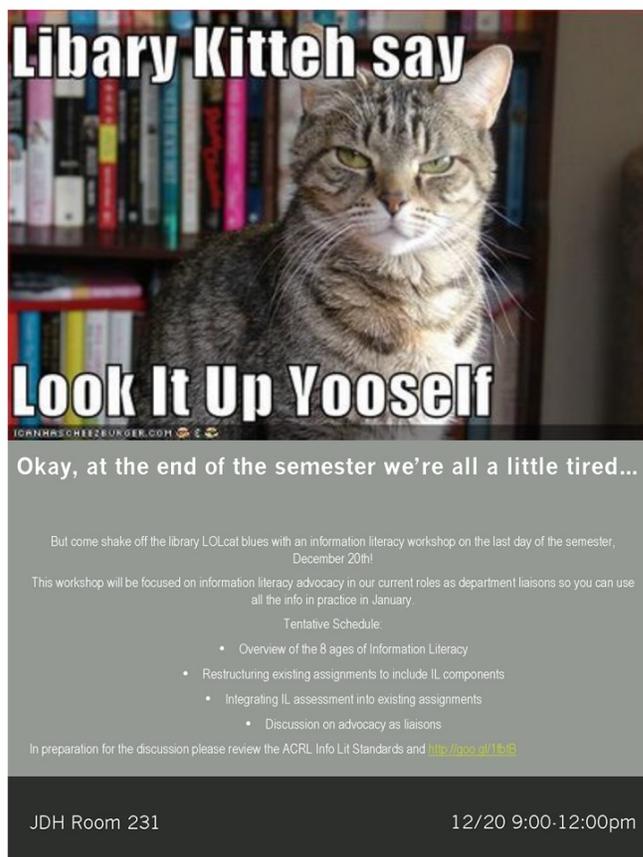
## ACTIVITIES

Based on the self-identified needs of the librarians and taking into account institutional context, we each designed an academic year-long professional development plan as a pilot for our institution. Each plan provides a variety of activities to see which are most effective and appeal to the librarians, with changes to be made at the conclusion of the year.

### Workshops

At UW Superior, faculty status requires an ever-growing number of meetings. Additionally, having a small time-constrained staff means scheduling meetings during the usual workday results in leaving the reference desk unattended. Holding a workshop during a typical day in the semester would generally result in low attendance and potentially foster a feeling of being overextended by the librarians attending. With this in mind, the instructor coordinator scheduled a half-day summer workshop and a half-day workshop during the winter semester break modeled after ACRL's Immersion program. Though attendance at both workshops was mandatory, humor was used in marketing the events to encourage a relaxed reflective environment.

**Figure 1: Instruction Workshop Flyer**



Libary Kitteh say

Look It Up Yooself

Okay, at the end of the semester we're all a little tired...

But come shake off the library LOLcat blues with an information literacy workshop on the last day of the semester, December 20th!

This workshop will be focused on information literacy advocacy in our current roles as department liaisons so you can use all the info in practice in January.

Tentative Schedule:
- Overview of the 8 ages of Information Literacy
- Restructuring existing assignments to include IL components
- Integrating IL assessment into existing assignments
- Discussion on advocacy as liaisons

In preparation for the discussion please review the ACRL Info Lit Standards and http://goo.gl/1fbIB

JDH Room 231          12/20 9:00-12:00pm

Based on the self-identified needs of librarians, the workshops were primarily geared towards developing a common language around information literacy that non-teaching librarians could use in their work as subject liaisons to market, advocate, and promote integrated information literacy instruction among the faculty they serve. These workshops have been successful in changing the institutional culture around librarians as educators. By focusing on liaison librarians' current needs and experience instead of administration's perspective, the workshop helped develop camaraderie and understanding between teaching and non-teaching librarians.

## Reading and Reading Groups

In order to facilitate discussion and reflection about teaching, UMD's instruction coordinator created a reading group in the summer of 2012. Participation in this group is voluntary, and meetings are scheduled approximately every other month. Participants select an instruction-related topic for discussion, and read an article or book chapter on that topic prior to the meeting. Based on feedback from participants, readings typically contain more practical strategies than theoretical background. Relatively short articles and chapters are also favored over lengthy scholarly articles. Topics included: assessment, strategies for teaching source evaluation, and faculty outreach. Meetings are informal and take place at local restaurants chosen by participants. Because food is available and topics are participant-driven, meetings have consistently been well-attended and received.

After the initial meeting of UMD librarians, UW Superior librarians (whose campus is only 10 miles from UMD's campus) were also invited to participate in the reading group. Including librarians from another institution has enriched the discussions, and allowed librarians from both institutions to share ideas and brainstorm solutions to the instructional challenges we face. As an outgrowth of the discussion group, librarians have now begun to share teaching and assessment materials across institutions, using Google Groups and Google Drive.

## Regional Professional Development Networks

Since both libraries are located in a geographically remote area, developing regional networks to provide professional development and support beyond our larger institutional networks was important to developing a culture that values instructional improvement. When meetings and "local" conferences are up to five hours away (in the case of UW Superior, which is quite far from the state of Wisconsin's population centers) it becomes too easy to feel isolated, unimportant, or excluded from instructional improvement activities. As newly hired instruction coordinators coming from larger institutions, our developing a relationship between UMD and UW Superior across state lines and some negative history were important to easing the effects of isolation.

In addition to establishing a professional relationship between the two campuses, we also sought to bring conference opportunities to us and others in our region. After casual conversations with local institutions we decided to host our own regional conference separate from institutional or ALA networks. The inaugural Lake Superior Libraries Symposium in June 2012 hosted over 130 librarians from all types of libraries around Northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Building on that success, the second symposium took place in June 2013. The ability to share information, resources, and expertise in the region has benefited local libraries and led to recognition by the state of Wisconsin, which presented conference planners with the "Standing Up for Rural Wisconsin Schools, Libraries, and Communities" award from the Department of Public Instruction in 2012. Institutional involvement in planning the conference has fostered reflective dialogue on librarianship, including teaching, at both institutions.

Finally, we also recommend taking advantage of existing networks and leveraging them to meet local needs. For example, UMD is an institutional member of the Minnesota Library Association. The Academic and Research Libraries Division (ARLD) of the Association offers ARLD Dialogues, discussion-based events held around the state on topics proposed by ARLD members. In spring 2013, UMD librarians collaborated with the ARLD board to host an instruction-related Dialogue at UMD titled "Moving Beyond the One-Shot Instruction Session." During the event, participants from five local institutions enjoyed a free lunch and discussed strategies for expanding library instruction beyond a single session. Strategies included: flipping the classroom, online tutorials, embedded librarianship, and credit-bearing information literacy courses. This event, the first of its kind to be held in Duluth, took place at no cost to the library.

## Campus Partnerships

Many campuses may offer a teaching excellence center. While librarians have traditionally been interested in hosting workshops for faculty on information literacy through these centers, these centers have much to offer for our own instructional improvement. At UMD, the office of Instructional Development Services (IDS) provides workshops, peer evaluation services, and discussion groups for instructors on campus. Librarians have regularly participated in IDS activities and workshops, but have often voiced concerns about the limited applicability of many teaching techniques to one-shot library instruction sessions. In fall 2012, these concerns were shared with IDS staff, who agreed to work with the library's instruction coordinator to provide a free workshop designed to address teaching librarians' needs. This workshop, called "Linking with Limited Interaction Learners," offered librarians a wealth of strategies for connecting with student interests, incorporating discussion and active learning, and expediting learning in one-shot, or limited interaction, instruction sessions. After this workshop, the library's relationship with IDS has become more collaborative: IDS staff gave librarians an opportunity to present strategies for online instruction and flipping the classroom at a later IDS event, and plan to feature library instruction in an upcoming IDS newsletter.

## FUTURE PLANS & RECOMMENDATIONS

At UW Superior, future plans include holding a monthly summer workshop geared towards preparing non-teaching librarians to become teaching librarians. The instruction coordinator will be on maternity leave most of fall semester so there is a renewed interest in how to teach one-shot sessions. The shift in local context has altered the self-identified needs of the librarians. At the first summer workshop we anticipate re-evaluating instructional improvement needs and continuing to develop an online instruction resource library through the use of Zotero groups as suggested by Tucker (2013).

At UMD, future workshops will focus on providing instructional services within Moodle, UMD's learning management system, in order to help librarians prepare to support a growing number of fully online courses. An additional goal is to incorporate peer evaluation and coaching more fully into our instructional improvement activities: while librarians have been given tools and training for peer evaluation, participation has so far been limited. Finally, in anticipation of eventual librarian retirements, the instruction coordinator will create a comprehensive plan for training new instruction librarians.

We recommend that those undertaking similar formalized in-house professional development programs start small and local to maximize buy-in. As instruction coordinators, we believe reflective conversations about instruction are valuable, but this belief is not always shared amongst our colleagues. Therefore, whenever possible, link your program to library and campus strategic goals to increase perceived relevancy, and explore assessment methods that can help demonstrate your program's impact. Over time, small activities will add up and create the culture of instructional improvement described as necessary in the literature. Ask yourself, "how can this program grow and change with your librarians?" And while we did not have this experience, "how can the program accommodate new librarians?" Finally, recognize that culture building is a slow process: find encouragement in the small victories, as your plan may take years instead of semesters to achieve.

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**UMD Survey Example**



## Instruction-related professional development

Please answer the following questions about the kinds of instruction-related professional development you'd like to participate in as an individual or as a team. This form is anonymous unless you include your name.

**Your name (OPTIONAL)**

**In which instruction-related areas would you like to develop your skills further?**
Please select your top three areas.

☐ Active learning strategies
☐ Assessment
☐ Collaboration with faculty
☐ Outreach/promotion to faculty/departments
☐ Teaching technologies
☐ Creating learning objects (tutorials, handouts, etc.)
☐ Planning/preparation
☐ Moodle/embedded online instruction
☐ Other:

**Comments on your areas for growth as an instructor:**

**How would you prefer to develop your skills in these areas?**

Choose all that apply.

☐ InfoShare

☐ Individual consultation

☐ Articles/books on topic

☐ In-person group discussion

☐ Online discussion

☐ Peer observation

☐ Webinars

☐ Other: [_____]

**Comments on preferred methods of professional development:**

[                    ]