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LIBRARY'S GOT TALENT! NEW LIBRARY INSTRUCTORS DISCOVER THEIR VOICES

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Like many other college and university libraries, Virginia Tech University Libraries is coping with both internal and external changes that impact most library services, including the University Libraries' information literacy and instruction program. External, campus-led changes are converging to create an increased demand for library instruction. Internal, library-led changes are emphasizing the transformation of the role of the library on campus, which has ultimately created the need for library faculty and staff to embrace new identities and develop new skill sets. Together, these internal and external changes have challenged University Libraries' traditional instruction team in a number of different ways.

Over the past several years, the evolution of the undergraduate curriculum and First Year Experience program increased the demand for library instruction and the role that University Libraries plays in teaching and learning at Virginia Tech. The number of instruction sessions doubled from 2010 to 2011, and again in 2012. The Virginia Tech Office of First Year Experiences was established in July 2009 as part of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) component of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools- Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC) Reaffirmation of Accreditation process (Office of First Year Experiences, 2013). University Libraries has been a First Year Experience partner since 2011, and since then, has been involved with every First Year Experience course. By 2014, campus and library leaders are projecting that all incoming 5,000 students will participate in First Year Experience classes on an annual basis. Ultimately, campus and library leaders anticipate a rate of growth that the University Libraries' traditional team of 15 teaching librarians will not be able to sustain.

In addition to the external changes impacting the University Libraries instruction program, outlooks and practices in every area at University Libraries are evolving, and library faculty and staff are seeking new areas of development and expertise. The University Libraries Strategic Plan for 2012-2018 states that the reinvention of the Libraries will "focus on…four areas: learning spaces, research and curation, teaching, learning, and literacies, and collection access" (Virginia Tech University Libraries, 2012, p. 1). Essentially, this means that the traditional distribution of responsibilities and skills is no longer sufficient for the new role of University Libraries on campus. Librarians and staff working in the Research and Instructional Services Department are taking on new responsibilities, and faculty and staff in other departments are interested in gaining new skills related to teaching and learning. In light of this environment of transformation and reinvention, it made sense for University Libraries to jettison the idea of the traditional instruction team and open up opportunities for anyone in the Libraries interested in teaching to join a new instruction team. This response to the changes at Virginia Tech University Libraries solves two challenges with one effort: it will help library faculty and staff gain new skills related to teaching and learning, which, in turn, will help support the increased demand for library instruction.

Virginia Tech University Libraries' Response to Changes

In order to build an instruction team large and skilled enough to meet the changing needs of the Virginia Tech community and the University Libraries as a whole, the University Libraries' Research & Instructional Services Department (RIS) decided to grow the instruction team by inviting library faculty and staff from other library departments to be trained and then begin participating in the instruction program. Led by RIS Director Lesley Moyo, the existing instruction team solicited volunteers from other library departments, such as Technical Services and Assessment and

Library Access Services. The call for volunteers went out in Spring 2012, and emphasized the need for librarians and library staff to help the existing instruction team teach basic information literacy sessions associated with lower-level English classes. Ten librarians and library staff responded to the call, and instruction team leaders began to develop a program for training the volunteers on information literacy and instructional effectiveness. Immediately, the library began reaping the benefits of a larger, more diverse instruction team: instruction librarians were able to increase the quality of the classes that they taught since the teaching load was reduced, and the new library instructors brought a fresh enthusiasm and innovative ideas to the entire team.

NEW INSTRUCTOR TRAINING PROGRAM

The lower-level English sessions are coordinated by the Instructional Services Librarian, and taught by any and all instruction librarians, including all College Librarians who also work with specific departments on campus. This is unlike the First Year Experience program, where information literacy sessions are usually facilitated by College Librarians with a subject specialty. For this reason, any faculty and staff volunteering to be part of the instruction team would be trained to teach with the goal of being able to effective facilitate a basic information literacy session for lower-level English classes.

Instruction program leaders, including the First Year Experience Librarian and the Information Literacy Coordinator, worked together to develop a twelve-week program to help the new instructors gain the skills and confidence they needed to embrace their changing roles and identities within the library. The program included readings and discussions focusing on proficiencies for instruction librarians, student characteristics, learning theories and preferences, instructional design, and teaching technologies. New instructors also participated in mock instructional sessions and were encouraged to observe others and reflect on their experiences throughout their first semester as an instructor. The twelve-week program took place during Summer 2012, and was intended to jump-start the new instructors' understanding of teaching and information literacy instruction. Continued support for the New Instructor Cohort, as the group came to be called, was planned for the rest of the 2012-2013 academic year, and will be described a bit later in this paper.

Figure 1: Group picture of 2012-2013 New Instructor Cohort

Foundational Ideas

The New Instructor Cohort was designed around three specific ideas: instruction proficiencies, teaching identities, and communities of practice. The first two ideas—instruction proficiencies and teaching identities—represent the goals of the training program, and the third idea—communities of practice—represents the strategy, or method, selected to help program participants achieve these goals. In other words, readings, presentations, and discussions related to instruction proficiencies and teaching identities contributed to the content of the New Instructor Cohort program, while the community of practice represented the framework of the program.

Anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) have researched and written much about communities of practice. They define a community of practice as a group of individuals with a common professional interest. By sharing experiences, information, and discussion, members of the group learn from each other and begin to develop identities shared by and related to a common sense of belonging to the group. In *How People Learn,* edited by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) it is noted that a community of practice "provides direct cognitive and social support for the efforts of the group's individual members" (p. 184). Because of the way that communities of practice leverage shared group experiences and promote the development of identities, a community of practice seemed the perfect framework for the New Instructor Cohort. The New Instructor Cohort became a community of practice as members met regularly to share experiences, set goals, and, eventually, observe each other teach. The instruction program leaders consistently emphasized the communal, rather than top down, nature of the group as the group learned about teaching in the library setting, and provided opportunities for members of the New Instructor Cohort to become part of the larger community of practice of instruction librarians at Virginia Tech.

Although New Instructor Cohort members worked to set and achieve group goals related to teaching and learning in

the library, program leaders used the ACRL Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators (2007) to guide the group. Program leaders reviewed the twelve categories of proficiencies, and eventually selected the most appropriate and relevant proficiencies for guiding the Cohort. These proficiencies included: communication skills, curriculum knowledge, information literacy integration skills, instructional design skills, planning skills, presentation skills, and teaching skills. The New Instructor Cohort reviewed the entire Standards for Proficiencies as a group, and discussed why and how the community of practice would be focusing on the seven categories of skills that were selected. These skills were organized into the structured, twelve-week program that took place during Summer 2012.

Finally, the goal of developing New Instructor Cohort participants' identities as teachers and educators lay at the core of the community of practice. In accordance with the goals described by the University Libraries Strategic Plan, Cohort participants needed to rethink and transform their understanding of their roles within the library. In building this component of the program and community of practice, program leaders were heavily influenced by a number of factors, including one of the leader's past experiences at an ACRL Information Literacy Immersion Program, which emphasized building teacher identity. Similarly, a blog post on *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* entitled, "Sense of self: Embracing your teacher identity," inspired program leaders to think carefully about promoting teacher identity and selecting resources and discussion topics that would do so (Donovan, 2009).

Logistics and Schedule

After individuals volunteered to participate in the program during Spring 2012, Summer 2012 was set aside to begin the community of practice and training program. The group agreed to meet once every two weeks, and to complete readings and homework between the meetings. The program began at the beginning of June, and ran through mid-August, directly before the students returned to begin the fall semester. See Appendix A for the full schedule, selected readings, and discussion topics included in the Summer 2012 program.

The Summer 2012 program devoted one session to each of the following topics: overview and discussion of proficiencies and standards, student characteristics and learning preferences, learning theories, instructional design, teaching technologies, and a classroom tour. Clearly, the content and discussions were abbreviated, since entire dissertations could be written about each of these individual topics! The sessions were designed as introductions to these complex topics, and to encourage Cohort members to begin to investigate these topics on their own as they began to teach. The Summer 2012 program culminated in a half-day workshop where Cohort members delivered a brief information literacy session based on a specific scenario.

After completing the twelve-week summer program, Cohort members were not expected to go straight into the

classroom and be ready to teach. Rather, an entire support and continuing education system including observations, mentoring, and co-teaching was developed and set into motion for the 2012-2013 academic year. New Instructor Cohort members were expected to take advantage of these additional opportunities and meet regularly—once a month—with Cohort leaders to discuss participants' progress and readiness to teach. Ultimately, Cohort members began to teach their first information literacy sessions during the Spring 2013 semester.

RESULTS AND PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

In May 2013, the 2012-2013 New Instructor Cohort celebrated completing an entire year of training, reflecting, and beginning to teach on their own. Preliminary assessments of the program and its effect on the participants indicate that this model has many benefits. In addition to leveraging the talent lying dormant in the library, the new, larger instruction team is now a multi-department group, utilizing new perspectives that are enhancing the quality of Virginia Tech University Libraries' information literacy program. Participants are also transferring new skills back to their home departments, some of which are now considering adopting a training model like the one developed for instructional services.

Besides gathering anecdotal feedback from Cohort participants about their experiences with the New Instructor Cohort, program leaders administered a thirteen-item survey in order to gather information about their motivations, confidence levels, outcomes, and recommendations related to the program. See Appendix B for a list of the specific questions asked on this survey. Findings form this survey offered helpful recommendations for changing the program in the future, and, more importantly, illustrated the impact of the New Instructor Cohort within the library as a whole.

Impact on Participants and University Libraries

Not surprisingly, five out of six survey respondents indicated that their levels of confidence in their skills as a teacher increased because of the New Instructor Cohort community of practice and training program. More interestingly, all six survey respondents also identified specific ways that the Cohort supplemented and helped them transform their approach to their "regular" jobs in the library. One respondent noted that, "it has given me an additional avenue to connect with students and faculty." Another respondent wrote that, "[I now have] a stronger understanding of discovery tools and databases we offer at VT." Several respondents also stated that the Cohort enhanced their public speaking skills.

Respondents also indicated that, as a result of participating in the Cohort, their interests and professional goals have shifted. Two participants who responded to the survey indicated that they are now considering applying to a graduate-level program in education or a related field. Five respondents reported that they are planning to pursue new research interests related to teaching and learning, and four respondents indicated

intent to participate in more professional development opportunities related to teaching and learning.

Recommendations for the Future

The six Cohort participants who responded to the survey offered a number of recommendations for the future of the Cohort program. While participants found all six training sessions during Summer 2012 to be helpful, the overwhelming response was that the workshop day was the most effective, and that more hands-on teaching activities needed to be included for the Cohort. Participants were not required to co-teach, but several survey respondents indicated that this sort of accountability would be helpful in the future. Respondents also indicated that more time to create lesson plans and engaging activities, with feedback from program leaders, would be a valuable addition to the training program.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to suggest continuing education topics for their cohort. Topics suggested included: concept-mapping tools, active learning techniques, communicating with faculty, distance learning, and engaging diverse groups. All six respondents indicated that they are committed to teaching during the 2013-14 school year, and are looking forward to participating in these continuing education opportunities and monthly meetings with the Cohort.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As of May 2013, four faculty and staff have volunteered to join the 2013-14 New Instructor Cohort. Program leaders are changing the New Instructor Cohort program based on feedback from the first Cohort, and will begin the second Cohort in June 2013. The first Cohort will remain a community of practice, and continue to grow as educators. The preliminary assessments of the first Cohort suggest that the group has been successful in accomplishing its goals; as the new instructors began teaching in Spring 2013, other teaching librarians greatly appreciated teaching fewer classes and being able to focus on building new skills and competencies. Likewise, the New Instructor Cohort participants clearly enjoyed benefits from building their own new skills and competencies, as they explored their teacher identities and embraced new roles within Virginia Tech University Libraries. New Instructor Cohort program leaders imagine this training model as the future of academic library professional development and training. As departmental boundaries blur and skill sets begin to cross, we will rely more on each other for strengthening and evolving ourselves and our institutions, and preparing to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century information environment.

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APPENDIX A

2012 New Instructors Training Schedule

Session 1: Summer overview and discussion of proficiencies and standards
- *Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators: A Practical Guide*
- *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*

Session 2: Student characteristics and learning preferences
- Beloit College. (2012). *The Mindset List*: *2012 List*. Retrieved from http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2012/
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Session 3: Learning theories
- Booth, C. (2011). A crash course in learning theory. In *Reflective teaching, effective learning: instructional literacy for library educators* (pp. 35-47). Chicago: ALA Editions. Available on Scholar.

Session 4: Instructional design
- Booth, C. (2011). A correctional course in instructional theory. In *Reflective teaching, effective learning: instructional literacy for library educators* (pp. 49-61). Chicago: ALA Editions. Available on Scholar.
- Herrman, R. (2012, May 30). Robotics, aquatics, and the history classroom. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu:8080/article/Robots-Aquaticsthe/132031/?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en. Also available on Scholar.

Session 5: Teaching technologies & classroom tour
- Booth, C. (2011). Teaching technologies. In *Reflective teaching, effective learning: instructional literacy for library educators* (pp. 63-82). Chicago: ALA Editions. Available on Scholar.

Session 6 Workshop Day (extended session)
- Weimer, M. (1990). How do you teach? A checklist for developing instructional awareness. In *Improving college teaching* (p. 207). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available in Scholar.

*Scholar is Virginia Tech's instance of Sakai, a learning management system (LMS).

Questions from the Spring 2013 New Instructors Training Survey

Why did you decide to volunteer to become part of the first cohort of RIS new instructors?

Rate your levels of confidence in your skills as a teacher before you began and after you completed the RIS new instructor training program.

The 12-week training program was divided into six different topics. Select the three that were most valuable in your training as a library instructor.

What would you add to the basic training program for future cohorts? Be as specific as possible.

How many classes did you observe before you began teaching classes on your own?

What was most helpful to you about observing classes before you started teaching on your own?

What was your biggest challenge as you prepared to teach your first class on your own or to co-teach with another librarian?

During the training, we talked about reflections and journaling. What role has this played in your growth as a teacher? If you haven't started journaling yet, what has prevented you from doing so?

What topics are you interested in pursuing through continuing education and development opportunities related to teaching and learning?

How did the RIS instructor training program supplement your regular "day job?" For example, what new skills were you able to bring to the tasks that you usually perform?

What thoughts, observations, comments, or opinions do you have about the RIS new instructors cohort and training program? For example, if a prospective participant in the RIS new instructor program asked you about your experience, what would you tell them?

As a result of participating in this program, have you gained any new interests or professional goals? Select all that apply.

Do you plan on continuing participating in this program in the future? Why or why not?