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ABSTRACT

The one-shot lecture format used in most information literacy/library instruction sessions generates a conflict between the objectives of the subject faculty member requesting the session and the objectives of the librarian conducting it. Trying to satisfy both sets of objectives often makes the librarian feel pulled in too many directions. Sometimes something as simple as an effective handout can resolve, or at least ameliorate, the conflict.

Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man is an almost universally-recognized image that offers symbolic content in a variety of contexts. To the architect the Vitruvian Man can represent proportion; to the physician, health; to the artist, form. The common thread running through all these symbolic valuations is a positive one of balance or order. But to the academic instruction librarian the Vitruvian Man can represent something quite different: being pulled in too many directions at once.

Librarians fortunate enough to teach a class in information literacy/library instruction rarely are confronted with this situation, but librarians working in the one-shot lecture format -- which is to say most of us -- face this dilemma constantly. And when one considers the many conflicting, sometimes contradictory, expectations inherent in the one-shot format, the dilemma becomes painfully obvious.

Trying to Serve Two Masters

First there is "the disconnect between [the instruction librarians'] mission and the goals of the average subject faculty member," for whom "the subject matter is everything" (Badke 2008, 47). Student skill in the research process is just assumed, and information literacy for lifelong learning not even an afterthought. One consequence of this is that librarians often have a "love/hate relationship with the one-shot session, [which is] both the bread-and-butter and the bane of library instruction" (Benjes-Small, Dörner, & Schroeder 2009, 38). This leads to a tension that might be described as a conflict between short-term objectives -- the class assignment which generated the

instruction session in the first place -- and long-term goals such as preparing students for broad-based information literacy and self-directed lifelong learning.

Of course we must teach to the assignment; for most of us it truly is the bread-and-butter which provides us the opportunities for instruction in the first place. But even if it were not, professional courtesy and campus collegiality, as well as good library PR, require us to honor these requests for assignment-driven instruction sessions even though the goals and priorities of the subject faculty may not match our own and the contexts of these sessions tend to make the librarians' role more reactive than proactive.

Instruction librarians initially are pulled in different directions by this conflict which is primarily philosophical, as it concerns differing perspectives among academic disciplines. But there are other conflicts which are more logistical in nature, and which mostly revolve around *time*. Librarians whose careers began during the print era often were counseled to "teach no more than three things" during an instruction session so as not to confuse students with information overload. At that time this was at least theoretically possible, since said instruction usually went little beyond how to use the card catalog and H.W. Wilson's print indexes.

It's a different world now. "With increases in both the quantity of information and the variety of information technologies being made available to researchers, the information literacy landscape is getting more complex. Simultaneously, the time allotted for library instruction is remaining essentially the same . . . [threatening an] overburdening of content" (Benjes-Small, Dorner, & Schroeder 2009, 31, 32). More and more is being put on the instruction librarian's plate, yet the plate itself is not getting any bigger. We still are confined to the sixty- or ninety-minute format, and this more complex information literacy landscape pulls us in competing directions even more than before. The assignment-driven one-shot lecture format too often causes us to focus on short-term information literacy skills which address the assignment while scanting or passing over transferable long-term skills which equip students for true information literacy and lifelong learning. The foundation is neglected. For example, because of the assignment we often teach students how to use *a* database instead of showing them how to *use* *databases* and explaining to them the differences between database types and vendors.

But neglecting the foundation still does not provide us time to cover all we need to. Even if the subject faculty member who requested the instruction session has already introduced the class to the initial steps in the research process -- selecting and limiting a topic, doing background research -- the mechanics of online searching still have not been addressed. The online catalog should be demonstrated; and with the databases, keyword searching and the use of abstracts as well as search vocabulary such as broader, narrower, or related terms. Truncation, nesting, and Boolean operators also must be explained. An understanding of all is necessary for successful database searching, and all should be covered during the instruction session.

Evan Farber has observed that "[t]he one-shot, one-class period of library instruction has always been hard to get, yet once gotten rarely seemed enough to provide as much

instruction as one felt appropriate. But now, with teaching the variety of databases within the library or available online, added to all the basic instruction, 50 minutes is hardly adequate” (Farber 1999, 233). Since Farber wrote this, many libraries have created instruction labs with multiple computer workstations to accommodate real-time searching by students, and this activity further cuts into the time available to the librarian for actual instruction. The librarian’s not having enough time to address all s/he should, yet feeling compelled to cover as much as s/he can, can lead to the result that “[o]ne-time lectures often serve more to confuse than enlighten; so much information is stuffed into one hour that very little is retained” (Self & Kampe 1980, 20).

As an instruction librarian I have long been aware of and been frustrated by these conflicting demands and the disjunction between the subject faculty member’s short-term goals for the library session and the instruction librarian’s long-term concerns regarding information literacy for lifelong learning, and the insufficiency of time to address both. I had become a Vitruvian Man. Pulled in too many directions, I needed to achieve balance and proportion by reconciling long-term with short-term in my instruction sessions.

Instruction at Houston Cole Library

My library, the Houston Cole Library of Jacksonville State University, is a tower library of twelve stories plus a basement (which houses our technical services department and instruction SmartLab of thirty-plus computer workstations, as well as other offices). Of the twelve above-ground floors, eight contain the library’s collection. The building dictates the collection arrangement, and the collection arrangement determines the staffing pattern. Houston Cole Library really does not have a generalist librarian position in its public services department; instead, each floor is staffed by a subject specialist with an advanced degree and/or experience with the subject(s) collected on the particular floor on which s/he serves. In addition to acquisitions duties, each subject specialist is responsible for providing information literacy/library instruction to classes taught by subject faculty whose subject matter is collected on that specialist’s floor.

Since my floor, the seventh, houses the English and American literature collections, I am the literature subject specialist for Houston Cole Library; and along with my reference and collection development responsibilities I provide instruction for freshman English classes and particularly the class for second semester freshman composition -- a staple of which is the research paper on a literary topic. Since freshman composition, along with basic math, is a course which nearly every freshman must take, over the course of an academic year this can amount to a lot of instruction sessions for me.

Even in the print era I always used handouts in my instruction sessions, in the hope that the handout would encourage students to take at least some notes and that notes written on a task-specific handout would be easier to locate later than notes scrawled in a notebook which soon would be filled with other notes. The arrival of online searching, electronic databases, and SmartLabs equipped with computer workstations presented the additional challenge of having to teach more than three things while trying to minimize the students’ content overload; teaching to the assignment so as to meet the subject

faculty member's wishes and expectations for the instruction session, and at the same time trying to avoid the problem with the one-shot lecture which James R. Self and Patricia C. Kampe identified: "Students learn specific titles and specific skills, rather technical in nature and limited in application. They have difficulty adapting these specific skills to other . . . research projects" (Self & Kampe 1980, 20).

After many disappointing starts which led to unsatisfactory results, I finally developed a handout which balances many, if not all, of the conflicting demands imposed by the one-shot lecture. Unlike previous handouts I had tried and abandoned which included everything from lists of print reference materials to screen captures to Venn diagrams, this handout is much more simple and focused and is far less "busy." I made a version for first semester freshman composition and one for second semester freshman composition, the principal difference being that the second semester handout is focused on literary research for the term paper. With the first semester comp classes I spend more time with the online catalog; and, since these classes usually come to the library with general assignments which cut across a variety of subject areas or sometimes with no assignment at all, I highlight a different group of databases.

Aside from this difference, my approach to each handout and my classroom presentation are the same: I walk the students through the handout, demonstrating the procedures outlined on it, and then toward the end of the session provide an opportunity for students perform the searches I have demonstrated on their own using their own topics, while my demonstration still is fresh in their minds. After a few opening remarks at the beginning of the library session I lock down the students' computer workstations to my instructor's keyboard, and they remained locked until I release them at the end of the lecture/demonstration so the students can perform their own searches. Because I provide instruction sessions mainly for the second semester freshman composition class, I will illustrate my use of the handout for that class.

Teach them to Fish? Give them a Fish? Give them a Handout!

The front side of the handout is simply a "recipe paper": a step-by-step of how to perform the searches the students will need to do for their literature assignment, and my "lecture" is basically a running commentary as I demonstrate the steps on the handout. One reason for choosing the recipe format is to impress upon students that research is a process, not an event, and they need to approach it as a series of incremental steps rather than a "one-and-done" encounter. By beginning with the database *Literature Resources from Gale* I am able to introduce students to the proprietary database as a type as well as, by using background and overview information, show them how to narrow a topic to a manageable scope for a freshman paper. I introduce the asterisk (*), which is the wild card/truncation symbol for our electronic databases, and also explain how to use field boxes to modify search results. These are among the "transferable skills" -- and I emphasize them as such -- students will need not only for academic success but also to become capable, self-directed lifelong learners. The proprietary database, with its smaller number of records indexed but higher percentage of full text documents, is used

for beginning and refining the search and to identify search terms before students move on to the aggregator databases.

I use the section on the library's online catalog as a buffer between the demonstrations of proprietary and aggregator databases. Because all the catalog searches are addressed in the instruction sessions for first semester English composition, in the second semester sessions I can focus just on those searches most applicable to the assignment: the Subject and Keyword searches. As with *Literature Resources from Gale*, the search terms I use as examples reference the assignment, but my comments during the demonstration make the connection with longer-term information literacy goals. In the Subject search I can contrast main headings with sub-headings and explain our library catalog's quick reference graybar, which provides call number, location and status information. The Keyword search allows me to elaborate on the differences between Subject and Keyword modes in entering search terms as well as explain Boolean operators. It also enables me to introduce the question mark (?), the wild card/ truncation symbol for our catalog. At this point I also explain why minor titles such as short stories, essays, and many poems cannot be used as search terms in the catalog, although they can be used in the electronic databases.

In either (or both) Subject and Keyword mode I can instruct students in how the additional subjects listing viewable on the catalog record can be used to expand search results when results from the initial search prove inadequate, and I can show them how the Detailed Record or Table of Contents screens can be used to gain insight regarding a book's contents without having the book physically in hand. These all are transferable skills that have both immediate and long-term value and are applicable in academic disciplines besides literature.

Cross-searching aggregator databases is another transferable skill students should know. They began with the proprietary database, *Literature Resources from Gale*, which has a lower number of records indexed but a higher percentage of available full text, to obtain background information on their topic, refine their search, and work out their search terms. Aggregator databases move students to a larger stage -- databases which have a greater number of records indexed although a lower percentage of full text -- and cross-searching multiple databases helps them overcome a major obstacle in database searching for literature: the fact that the MLA International Bibliography Online, the principal database for literary research, has very little full text content and provides almost no article abstracts. Bringing additional databases into the search helps remedy these lacks. The handout provides lists of cross-searchable databases organized by vendor.

The database cross-searching portion of the lecture-demonstration permits me to reprise in a different context some things introduced earlier in the session, such as field boxes, Boolean operators, and the *, and also provides opportunity to illustrate the importance of search vocabulary -- which goes beyond truncation to include related, broader or narrower terms -- and explain how to build a working bibliography using folders or mark boxes. All of these are transferable skills that are applicable beyond the

assignment which generated the instruction session. (Because something does not appear on the handout does not mean it is not addressed in the session; I am trying to limit the handout to one double-sided sheet, after all.)

The Worksheet on the reverse side of the handout complements the recipe portion of the handout and, like the recipe, is intended as a memory jog to help students. The Worksheet identifies the topic, databases, search terms, and books the students selected during the library session, and if some days pass before they return to the assignment they do not risk having to start over from scratch because they have forgotten what they did during the session. But the Worksheet also provides the connective tissue that holds together the framework of the lecture-demonstration that is the recipe, and establishes the foundation for the main interactive component of the library session: students' real-time catalog and database searching following the lecture-demonstration.

Each of the numbered components on the Worksheet is brought into play at the appropriate point in the session. The Topic is addressed at the very beginning, when students are instructed to fill in the blank with the name of the author and the title of the literary work they will be researching for their assignments. The author and title are terms used in the database searches. If databases in addition to the databases already named on the handout are needed, *Biography Resource Center* for example, those database names are entered on Worksheet #2. The call numbers of books students believe might be useful in their research are entered on the blanks at #4 on the Worksheet. Keywords for the database searches are listed on the blanks at #3. This includes principal focus terms and also alternate and truncated terms. If the students fill in the blanks on the Worksheet as they do their real-time searches toward the end of the session and also avail themselves of print/e-mail/save options and the folders and mark lists, they have in place the foundation for follow-up research long after the instruction session has ended.

Worth the Effort?

How well have the handouts fulfilled their purpose? "Scientific" data is unavailable, but observable and anecdotal evidence is encouraging. The subject faculty who request the instruction sessions seem to be pleased, because since adopting these handouts my sessions taught in an academic year have increased by a third, going from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties and, a couple of times, exceeding forty sessions. I get repeat business, and some teachers request me specifically when they submit sessions requests to our instruction coordinator. The handouts apparently work for the students, because since adopting these handouts I have far fewer students approaching me for individual point-of-need follow-ups on what we covered in the sessions. The memory jog strategy seems to be successful, and I have had subject faculty tell me that even if their students take no other notes during the instruction session they are careful to fill in the blanks on the Worksheet as the session progresses.

The handouts clearly work for me, and not only for the reasons already specified. Previous to these, I revised or replaced instruction handouts every year and sometimes even between semesters, in an effort to get results I was satisfied with. I have not seen a need to make major changes to these handouts in almost four years, and I feel they give me the flexibility to cover the immediate needs of the assignment while also addressing general information literacy and life-long learning skills. These handouts have allowed me to approach “the ideal: where both the teacher’s objectives and the librarian’s objectives are not only achieved, but are mutually reinforcing – the teacher’s objectives being those that help students attain a better understanding of the course’s subject matter, and the librarian’s objectives being those that enhance the students’ ability to find and evaluate information” (Farber 1999, 233). The handouts give me an adequate response to the many obligations tugging at me as an instruction librarian. Perfect balance may not be achievable, but order and proportion to some degree have been restored; and, unlike da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man, I no longer am extended in too many directions. I can stand at ease.

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