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CAMPUS CRAWL: COLLABORATIONS TAKING INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION BEYOND SUBJECT MATTER AND INTO STUDENT LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

Learning is not confined to the classroom. The venues in which college students discover, reflect upon, synthesize and create information can be as formal as a lecture hall, as casual as a dorm's common area, or as small as a cell phone screen. Nonetheless, when it comes to academic librarians' contributions to student experiences, the classroom is often seen as a starting and ending point; a space in which librarians provide information literacy instruction in the context of a discipline-specific assignment.

Reaching beyond subject matter and outside of the classroom presents librarians with opportunities to engage with students while helping these students develop the set of integrated skills that comprise information literacy. At the same time, in an era where colleges and universities are increasingly called upon to demonstrate their contributions to student success, such outreach provides opportunities for collaboration and conversation that can help librarians demonstrate value.

RATIONALE

The rationale involved in engaging beyond the classroom, as with the student populations and campus partners identified, may vary based upon institutional needs and structures. In many cases, however, both pedagogical and pragmatic factors are important considerations.

Student Identities and Experiences

Ask students (or librarians) to describe themselves in a single phrase and chances are the response will be a furrowed brow and a moment of contemplative silence. An individual's identity has many facets, and even over the course of a day a variety may emerge, based on environment and mood. As Love and Edwards (2009) observe, "Traditional, faculty-based library instruction reaches students only in their academic role, thereby overlooking the multiplicity of identities students may assume" (p. 21). With much library instruction following the "one shot" model, to limit information literacy instruction to this venue is to risk limiting learning. Students not engaged during the class period in which library instruction occurs may come away with nothing gained. Even those who are interested may leave with the sense that what they have learned pertains only to academia, or perhaps just to a particular course or subject.

Today, discussions of information literacy increasingly focus on perceptions of it as a set of skills for lifelong learning, as well as a "social practice" that involves the connecting of these skills across platforms (Delaney and Bates, 2015, p. 39). These discussions also broaden its scope to emphasize "metaliteracy," which the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015) describes as "an overarching set of abilities in which students are consumers and creators of information" ("Introduction"). It is interesting to consider these definitions in the light of Kuh and Gonyea's (2003) findings from nearly two decades of responses to the College Student Experiences Questionnaire that library experiences did not seem to directly correlate to information literacy gains. As the authors note, while several factors could explain this finding, one consideration is that a range of

experiences influence information gains and that perhaps there is “no silver bullet (or single intervention) that will produce an information-literate college graduate” (2003, p. 371). Their research, recently republished in *College & Research Libraries’ 75th anniversary issue* (2015), underscores the idea of classroom-based instruction being only one of a variety of approaches librarians should consider in facilitating student learning.

Campus Considerations

Limiting information literacy to the classroom not only runs the risk of ignoring the breadth of student identities; it also carries the chance of overlooking entire populations. At some colleges and universities, having a library session is a course requirement. At others, being able to see every class may be unfeasible due to time or space constraints. Moreover, there may be groups, such as transfer students and those with certain placement exam scores, who are not required to take the general education courses in which much library instruction occurs.

Changes to institutional services and priorities provide additional motivations to consider taking information literacy instruction beyond the classroom. Many institutions are experiencing “super-convergence,” a trend that began several decades ago with the collocation of library and information technology services (Weaver, 2013, p. 104) and continues today with learning commons that bring together tutoring centers, counseling services, library research desks and other student-oriented entities. Shared spaces increase the need for those who work with students to understand the entire trajectory of students’ experiences (Weaver, 2013). Librarians may not only have the opportunity to step into new roles, or reinterpret existing ones; they may be required to do so.

With the opportunity for new or reinterpreted roles come opportunities for deepening existing partnerships, as well as developing new ones. Given the range of student experiences and identities each college campus contains, no one department or office has the ability to support the entirety of student needs alone. Instead, it is through collaboration that lifelong learners who can effectively and ethically discover, evaluate, and disseminate information emerge. Such collaboration not only benefits students; it also provides an opportunity for librarians to show, rather than tell of, their value with firsthand illustrations of their role as active partners in university initiatives (Delaney and Bates, 2013). As campus partners learn more about library offerings that go beyond traditional perceptions, they can use this knowledge to help connect additional students to the libraries. In turn, as librarians gain a greater understanding of other campus initiatives, they can link students to an increased range of services that support their needs and leave them poised to learn.

APPROACHES

In Fall 2014, the two authors joined the University of Tennessee, Knoxville as Student Success Librarians, one focused on First Year Programs and the other on Undergraduate User Experience. These roles arose from a campus call for new positions that would support the public research university’s strategic focus on student retention and graduation. In both positions, we focus on helping undergraduate students learn the tools of scholarship while adjusting to campus life. Although each role involves some classroom-based library instruction, our positions also focus on non-traditional liaison roles that involve functions, offices and campus initiatives rather than subject disciplines. Among these focus areas are: student veterans, transfer students, the Division of Student Life and the Office of Service Learning. The sections below provide snapshots of several ways we are striving to build relationships and take information literacy outside the classroom.

Library Take Out

Library Take Out began in Fall 2013 as a way to offer information literacy instruction and library programming outside of the library. As Student Success Librarian for First Year Programs (then a Library Diversity Resident), I discovered that, as a requirement of their positions, resident assistants (RAs) have to produce six programs per semester for their residence halls. In designing a menu of offerings to launch *Library Take Out*, my approach was two-fold: first, identifying crucial information literacy skills that are applicable outside the classroom, thus making sessions relevant; and second, branding and using audience-appropriate language when “selling” the program to RAs. The program’s goal is to engage students outside of library spaces, ultimately leading students to participate in conversations and activities that enable them to see information literacy as a part of everyday life. Engaging students in such a way also provides a forum for changing students’ perspectives about the libraries and its relationship to their time at the university, building new understandings that are invaluable to the process of developing information-literate lifelong learners.

To begin forging relationships, I presented *Library Take Out* to RAs at each dorm’s regular staff meetings. This served to introduce the program to RAs, but also to inform them of services and opportunities that they might not be aware of and thus could share with students, even if they did not host a formal *Library Take Out* program. Program offerings began with four broad categories: “Library Instruction,” “Residence Life Research Support,” “Civility in Action,” and “You Are a Grown-Up; Now What?”. It in turn grew, due to multiple requests from RAs, to include special “off-menu” options, including a murder mystery, four-hour film festival, an “Information Power Game” and sessions focused on dealing with difficult conversations. The success of the programming has

been measured by attendance, a five-question evaluation, and engagement in the activities. Attendance has ranged from 3 to 60 students, with several RAs returning each semester to continue their partnership, as well as new RAs participating. These continued and growing relations serve as the greatest testament to the success of *Library Take Out*.

Transfer Students

At our institution, transfer students represent a diverse and growing population. The challenges of reaching these students involve knowing who and where they are. As Student Success Librarian for Undergraduate User Experience, one valuable way I have begun to meet these challenges is through service on the campus' Transfer Committee. Through attending monthly meetings, I have been able to discover and reflect upon the experiences these students have, from admission and credit transfer procedures, to existing outreach initiatives.

My experiences with the Transfer Committee have expanded my understanding of the processes involved with transfer students' development of information literacy skills and their ability to navigate university life, particularly for those who transition from a community college. It also has revealed new avenues for communication. With no specific courses designated for transfer students, my initial plan had been to send a survey or host a focus group to gauge these students' knowledge and needs—but I struggled to find an appropriate listserv, office or other forum to launch such an assessment. Through the Transfer Committee, I learned of a new campus chapter of a national transfer student honor society. Attending this group's orientations and receptions has provided a chance to talk to transfer students informally and to hear firsthand of needs and interests I might otherwise have overlooked, such as navigating a large campus, getting to the library's website and finding a social niche. In the future, I see possibilities to involve the honor society, and the larger community of transfer students that it serves, and learn with and from them in developing initiatives. Working with transfer students directly to develop new programs that account for and reflect their identities increases the likelihood that such offerings will resonate with them. Such work also reaffirms the importance of collaboration. Being a transfer student may be just one of many facets of how an individual sees him or herself. Status as a veteran, distance-education student or adult learner may be other facets to consider when engaging these students or reaching out to potential collaborators to support them.

Student Advisory Committee

Comprised of an undergraduate and a graduate representative from each of the university's colleges and schools, as well as its student government, the libraries' Dean's Student Advisory Committee (DSAC) has provided another opportunity to encourage student engagement in a non-traditional manner. Meetings occur 2-3 times per semester, with "coffee catch-ups" of 2-4 students as an option for students who cannot attend. More than a chance for members of the libraries' team to share updates, these meetings serve as a forum for discussion, a place for students to learn from one another, and a launching point for them to share what they have learned with their peers.

DSAC conversations have provided a way to bring facets of information literacy described in the ACRL *Framework* (2015) to life, particularly the frames of research as inquiry and scholarship as conversation. It has been particularly rewarding to pose questions to students and have them respond not with answers but with additional questions. For instance, during a discussion of what the libraries should request in the campus' annual tech fee process, students shared experiences of their fellow students indicating that the library had or did not have certain technology and asked which of these "urban legends" were true. It has also been interesting to hear how students advise each other, whether about campus resources, library use or general recommendations about the surrounding community, engaging with information literacy as a social process. Perhaps most interesting is that, without prompting, students have shared meeting notes and topics with others in their disciplines and friend groups. Looking to the coming year, and drawing upon both student anecdotes and feedback from a forthcoming end of semester survey, we are eager to explore ways to continue this momentum and to develop ways to both bring diverse student perspectives into DSAC activities and to bring dialogue from these activities to a broader student base.

CONSIDERATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Engaging students outside of the classroom does not necessitate brand new roles or developing all partnerships from scratch. Using both their expertise and their interests, librarians in varied capacities have the power to contribute to such engagement. At our university, for instance, a Business Librarian used her subject knowledge and personal interest to create a "Financial Literacy Bootcamp," bringing a set of everyday life success skills to students across campus. Our Instruction Librarian drew upon a longstanding relationship with the campus Writing Center to develop a new partnership in which libraries provide occasional research assistance in the Writing Center, reaching early-career undergraduates who might not set foot in the library for such help. The Student Success Librarian for Undergraduate User Experience and a colleague stepped beyond their position descriptions to a shared interest in ethnography and developed a whiteboard assessment project that garnered student feedback in an unexpected, informal manner while fostering student-to-student and student-to-librarian dialogue.

The suggestions shared below are included to help librarians in varied roles consider how they may start, or enhance, conversations and practices regarding student engagement, both within their library and across their institution.

- *Learn about yourself* – Consider who you are as a librarian and a person. What unique skills and interests do you bring to your campus?
- *Learn about your audience* – Focus both on who you want to reach and why. Delaney and Bates (2013) suggest concentrating on your audience’s aspirations, rather than library tools, when marketing (p. 35), an approach also valuable in program development.
- *Learn by listening* – Understanding your audience’s aspirations involves hearing from them, even if not directly. Often, unobtrusive approaches like hosting a whiteboard forum or attending student-oriented events can provide unique insights.
- *Learn about your campus community* – Finding out what is happening outside of the library can pave the way for partnerships with others interested in your same audience. Understanding institutional priorities can help create buy-in for getting new programs the support needed to get off the ground. It can also help you develop inroads in areas where it may seem difficult to know where students are.
- *Look inward as well as outward* – The most valuable partners could be others within your library or even department, in addition to those across campus.
- *Talk their talk* – Consider what language will resonate with your potential partners, as well as your audience. Sometimes the value of a program gets lost in the marketing used to describe it.
- *Consider both present and future needs* – Is a partnership scalable? Will additional resources be required for growth and expansion? How will you define and assess success? Beginning with the future in mind can help promote sustainability and prevent headaches.
- *Have patience in the process* – Partnerships do not happen overnight, and sometimes collaborations that seem the most viable fail to thrive based on factors beyond librarians’ control. Understand that ideas may take longer to germinate than expected, and that there is value both in continued attempts and in going in a different direction than planned.
- *Appreciate the journey* – As you consider how to engage with students, remember to keep yourself engaged. Enthusiasm for what you are doing and where you are going can play a pivotal role in enjoying your experience and motivating others to join in for the ride.

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