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Training Students at Small & Medium Sized Colleges in Information Literacy (Chapter Excerpt)

D. Russell Bailey
Providence College

Julie DeCesare
Providence College

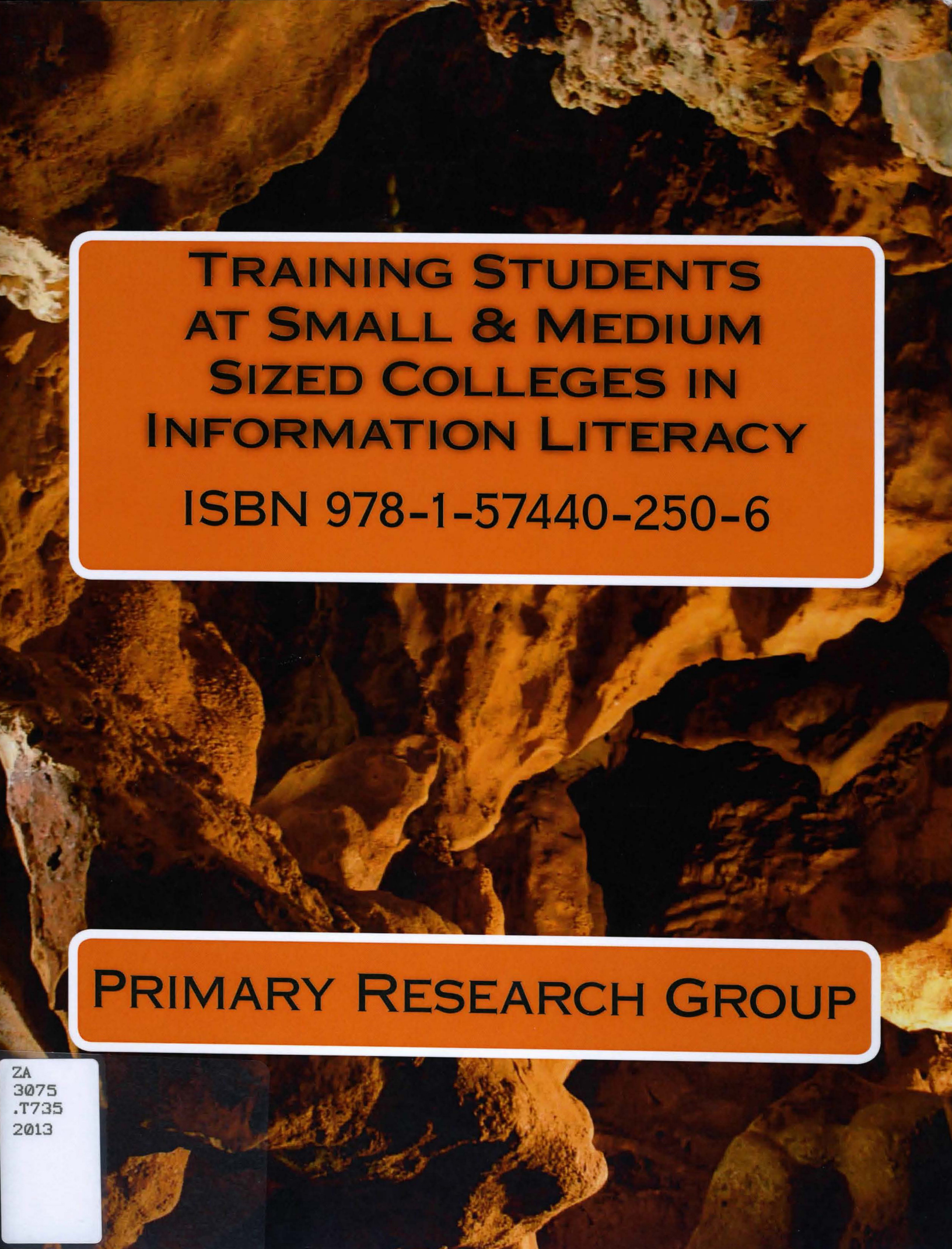
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The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a cave interior. The walls and ceiling are composed of dark, jagged rock formations, illuminated by warm, orange-brown light that creates deep shadows and highlights the textures of the rock. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ancient.

**TRAINING STUDENTS
AT SMALL & MEDIUM
SIZED COLLEGES IN
INFORMATION LITERACY**

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PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

Providence College is a 4-year, Catholic, private not-for-profit located in Providence, Rhode Island. The college was founded in 1917 and has a current total enrollment of 5,034 students. The most popular majors include biology, management, psychology, special/elementary education, marketing, political science and accountancy. The Phillips Memorial Library was opened in January 1969 on the upper campus of Providence College. We spoke with Russell Bailey, Library Director, and Julie DeCesare, Head of Research and Research Education.

ONE-SHOT SESSIONS

Last year, the library conducted 110 one-shot sessions. The average class size was eighteen students. Subjects whose professors frequently requested these sessions were primarily history classes, followed by English and biology. The sessions generally last fifty minutes and include a basic overview of the library's website and contact information, followed by a discussion of the library's catalogue and how to navigate it, as well as specific databases, journals, and advanced Google searching.

The increase in the library's information literacy efforts over the past few years is predominantly due to the growing efforts in reaching out to students outside of the classroom. Aside from one-shot sessions within the classroom, the library also offers drop-in sessions. Through past experience, the library has learned that the best way to maintain students' interests are through heavily marketed one-shot sessions and partnerships with other communities on campus. Typically, if the session is not tied to some kind of credit, students are less likely to attend.

VOLUNTARY SESSIONS

One recent session, titled “Apps and Advertisers” was a collaboration with the Office of Academic Services and provided instruction for students and faculty on using several different iPod apps useful in conducting research. The library also offers a series of Academic Integrity sessions which are done as a partnership with the Office of Academic Integrity. Held in a classroom within the library, these sessions discuss the definition of academic integrity, as well as how to use proper citation and avoid plagiarism. The library developed the sessions after multiple faculty members requested such classes to be offered outside of the one-shot sessions. These sessions are typically either mandatory or assigned as extra credit for students.

The library also offers a financial literacy program during the college’s “Money Smart Week.” The program, which consists of three sessions held within the library, is gaining popularity amongst students because of its applicable subject matter. The sessions focus on managing finances, salary negotiation, basic budgeting, and other financial issues that affect college students, especially those who are about to enter the job market. The program is a product of the library’s partnership with the Rhode Island Student Loan Association and many of the classes are taught by local companies and financial advisors. While the sessions are not mandatory, the students’ growing interest in financial literacy keeps attendance high.

In terms of plans for future sessions, the library hopes to implement other projects surrounding iPods and apps, since the staff has noticed that students frequently have difficulty using these devices. The library also wants to implement more citation and reference-related work.

STAFF

The library has 32 full-time employees, five part-time, and 25 part-time student assistants. The student assistants are carefully selected and work as paid employees, eligible for

promotions and raises, as part of a work scholarship. The library tries to hire the students as freshman and keep them for four years so they can attain the highest skill level possible. All staff positions are based on cross training and relative expertise. The staff is encouraged to be aware of everything that goes on in the library. Seven full-time librarians and one part-time library assistant participate in information literacy instruction. The amount of time each staff member spends on implementing general information literacy efforts varies from person to person. For Julie, it's around 50% of her time.

COLLABORATING WITH FACULTY

In terms of encouraging faculty to request information literacy sessions, Julie takes measures such as telling faculty members not to cancel class if they will be out for a conference, but rather to invite her to conduct a session. Julie also even offers more time-efficient 20 minute sessions, "any way to get our faces into the classroom."

The library will also have a new faculty orientation this summer which is not mandatory, although a majority of faculty do attend. The orientation will include an informal meet-and-greet for the incoming faculty to become acquainted with the library staff. The library also plans to offer a similar event for regular faculty in the Fall, which will be more of an open house. Julie explained that this is an important opportunity for the library to build a connection with faculty members. Because of the incoming faculty orientation, new faculty are typically more likely to request a session in their classroom because the library has recently established a face-to-face relationship with them. The library has also partnered with the coordinator of academic affairs to write a faculty resource guide so that faculty members will be familiar with what the library can provide for them. The library is also working with the school's marketing committee to prepare a letter that will be sent to students and faculty during the summer regarding new items in the library.

LIBGUIDES, TUTORIALS, AND DATABASES

The library has a total of 95 LibGuides, all of which are created by Julie and an assistant reference librarian. Together, they created a template, or “storage guide,” which is directly connected to all of the other guides. When a change needs to be made to every LibGuide, the altered template will automatically adjust each individual guide.

The library typically recommends four “go-to” databases for any subject: Jstor, Academic Search Complete, Project Muse, and Credo Literati. The library’s website provides a list of all available databases sorted both alphabetically and by subject. The library also has a number of virtual WebGuides which list key websites based on each particular subject. Through their recent partnership Credo Literati, the library has added around 8 new video tutorials to their collection. The library also uses tutorials from outside vendors, most frequently Purdue Owl’s online writing lab and Google’s Advanced Research tutorial.

ADVICE FOR OTHER LIBRARIES

In terms of advice for other libraries, Julie emphasizes listening to what each faculty member wants and not to be resigned to a text model. She suggests being “format agnostic,” meaning looking at what other formats are out there rather than strictly being tied to what’s in the catalog. “Be aware that research can reach out to students no matter the platform,” Julie advises. She also stresses staying current with platforms, and that there are essential core pieces for every information literacy session, such as learning about the web and why it is useful. She also suggests finding which databases are the strongest to use for particular subjects.

FACILITIES

The library, which was recently renovated in 2004, consists of three floors and is currently undergoing a ten-year renovation project: up until this point, the library has also housed three outside departments, and 60 offices, which are in the process of being transferred to

separate buildings. This will open up new space for a variety of purposes, both library and non-library related, including student collaborative research areas, IT services, a café, and a museum for student art. These new additions will most likely benefit the library, even those that are not explicitly related to the library since, according to Russell, the library is “quite the opposite of a segregated traditional library” and has integral collaborative partners in all aspects of teaching.

USAGE OF COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The library has 110 desktops, a combination of both Windows and Apple, which are spread out throughout its three floors. The library also has about 40 laptops, Windows and MacBook, which can be lent out to students and faculty. Additionally, the library has about 40 iPads and four netbooks which students and faculty can use as well. Laptops are currently the device highest in demand, but the library prefers netbooks because they are cheaper and more portable. The library has a very strong wireless connection; students are encouraged to bring their own devices, and many of the desktops are also wireless.

In terms of which type of device the library prefers, Russell explains that “we try to be agnostic in whatever will allow faculty to gain knowledge that they need; our focus is on improving research skills of everyone so anything we can do to allow that.” After students borrow a particular device, they are offered an evaluation survey. While the survey is not mandatory, the library encourages students to take it by entering them in a gift card raffle.

RESEARCH EDUCATION

The library recently stopped using the term “information literacy” because, according to Russell, the suggestion that someone is either literate or not literate in a subject is too polarizing. The library has substituted the term with “research education,” which implies that students of all ages come into the classroom with a certain level of competency which will be developed over time.