

Redesigning Library Instruction: A Collaborative Process

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Abstract

Redesigning library instruction should be a collaborative process, contingent on contributions from librarians and faculty. Librarian-faculty collaboration to redesign library instruction reinforces course curriculum and learning objectives, integrates information literacy standards across curriculum, promotes critical thinking and technology skills, and demonstrates academic librarians' knowledge of pedagogy and instructional design. Indiana Tech's McMillen Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana uses a variety of methods to foster collaboration between librarians and faculty during the library instruction redesign process. This collaborative process creates a learning environment built upon the academic, professional, and lifelong learning successes of students.

Keywords: instructional design, librarian-faculty collaboration, information literacy, lifelong learning

Academic librarians have long been champions of information literacy, critical thinking, and technology skills on college/university campuses, and, as such, have become knowledgeable in pedagogy and instructional design. Librarian-faculty collaboration and instructional design have become familiar topics in library literature. Seminal titles, such as Raspa and Ward's (2000), *The collaborative imperative: Librarians and faculty working together in the information universe*, emphasize the importance of librarian-faculty collaboration in promoting information literacy and reinforcing the role of academic libraries and librarians in higher education. Academic librarians are collaborating with faculty to integrate information literacy across curriculum, embed library instruction into course management systems, and redesign traditional one-shot lecture-based library instruction programs to meet the changing needs of today's students (Hoffman, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Kumar, Ochoa, & Edwards, 2012; Xiao, 2010; Zanin-Yost, 2012). Faculty, nevertheless, may not always pair pedagogy and the library together; yet, they are a natural fit. Collaborating with university faculty to redesign library instruction demonstrates librarians' aptitude to foster information literacy education and lifelong learning while reinforcing course curriculum and learning objectives.

Redesigning library instruction should be a collaborative process reliant on contributions from librarians and faculty.

Traditional one-shot lecture-based library instruction has minimal impact on college students' information literacy, critical thinking, and technology skills in the 21st century. The traditional undergraduate student population is now largely composed of digital natives who are often bored by the emphasis of library resources, resource evaluation, and anti-plagiarism while the non-traditional population is comprised of digital immigrants who are frequently dazed by the influx of technology and resources used in the classroom (Jesnek, 2012; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Levine & Dean, 2012; Mears, 2012; Rosen, 2011; Rosen, 2010; Sheldrake & Watkin, 2013). The use of traditional one-shot lecture-based library instruction on campuses fails to align with this diversification of the student population. Seeking partnerships with university faculty to redesign library instruction—in an effort to move away from traditional library instruction—can create a vibrant learning environment built upon students' academic, professional, and lifelong success.

The collaborative process at Indiana Tech's McMillen Library is purpose driven—it's both intentional and meaningful in nature. An instruction/reference librarian position was established at McMillen Library during the 2013-2014 academic year to address the information literacy and instructional needs of students at Indiana Tech. The creation of this new position initiated the evaluation of instructional design, learning objectives, and assessment tools at the library. Faculty members interested in instructional design and classroom innovation were approached initially by the librarians about redesigning library instruction. These faculty members have worked with the librarians to redesign library instruction based on the skills necessary for lifelong learning while reinforcing information literacy standards, critical thinking, technology skills, and course goals.

Efforts to increase faculty involvement in the instructional design process of library instruction sessions at McMillen Library have increased the quality of library instruction, library instruction requests, and student satisfaction, as indicated by library instruction statistics and post-library instruction evaluations. McMillen Library has traditionally offered two types of library instruction, Orientation to Library Resources and Specific Instruction Related to a Class Project (SIRCP).

Orientation to Library Resources is designed as a basic library orientation and covers the fundamentals of using academic libraries—electronic databases, Library of Congress, online catalogs, subject guides, etc. Whereas, SIRCP is course/assignment driven—instruction and activities can vary greatly. These sessions are administrated by the librarians based largely on subject liaison areas and availability. By using a variety of methods to collaborate with faculty at Indiana Tech, McMillen Library is expanding beyond traditional one-shot lecture-based library instruction to offer recurrent and embedded instruction, as well as project-based learning activities. Below are descriptions and tips regarding the different methods that McMillen librarians use to build meaningful collaboration between the library and faculty.

Fun & Meaningful Activities

Librarians work together with faculty at Indiana Tech to design fun hands-on activities for library instruction sessions that align with students' needs. These are primarily project-based learning activities that encourage student engagement and collaboration while incorporating information literacy, critical thinking, and technology skills into the project design. The librarians at McMillen Library normally request that faculty schedule library instruction one week in advance. Project-based learning activities, however, take a substantial amount of time to coordinate and plan. Librarians need time to incorporate information literacy and lifelong learning skills into classroom activities while faculty need time to adjust their course curriculum and schedule for project-based activities. These activities at McMillen Library are being planned up to a year in advance.

While these activities can be time consuming to develop, students benefit from the interactive approach. The extra time spent on effective library instructional design has correlated with an increase in post-library instruction evaluation scores for both McMillen Library and its librarians. Students' evaluation of library instruction jumped .12 points from 4.27 to 4.39 (on a 5 point scale) between the fall and spring semesters during the 2013-2014 academic year. Students indicated a higher understanding and ability to use library resources, and a greater comfort level with the library as a whole.

Tips:

1. Design activities that gauge students' technology, critical thinking, and information literacy skills while highlighting library resources and course goals.
2. Have co-workers and/or student workers participate in a trial run of the activity to identify any design flaws.

Flexibility with Scheduling

It is important to schedule library instruction sessions based on specific faculty and course needs. Faculty may be unaware of the different services offered by the library.

The librarians at McMillen Library let faculty know, whether during a formal liaison meeting or an informal passing conversation, that library instruction can occur in many different forms. An upper-level research course may benefit from recurrent library instruction sessions on advance research methodologies throughout the duration of the course, while an introductory course may benefit from a library scavenger hunt and a post-activity reflection session.

Tips:

1. Interview faculty to ensure that services requested, services rendered, and services needed align.
2. Avoid a preset formula for library instruction.

Gather Research Topics

At McMillen Library, librarians collaborate with faculty to generate a list of students' course-specific research topics to increase engagement and interaction during library instruction. According to Fox and Doherty (2012), "In its simplest form the concept of backward design in education is the process of defining the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes/dispositions . . . associated with a course or curriculum, and then building the course or curriculum in ways that help the student achieve these outcomes" (p. 145). In this sense, librarians and faculty can use the backward design model to redesign library instruction based on course-specific research topics. For example, the course and assignment objectives can be paired with the course-specific research topics to establish learning outcomes for the library instruction session. Those learning outcomes can then be used to design the library instruction session.

Tips

1. Emphasize the importance of generating a research topics list to the development of library instruction sessions to faculty.
2. Use the research topics list during the instruction session to highlight relevant library resources.

Assignments & Assessment Tools

Librarians at McMillen Library assist faculty in designing library and information literacy related assignments and assessment tools for their courses when needed. Assignments and assessment tools can reinforce information literacy standards, be course-specific, and tied directly to or independent of library instruction, critical thinking and technology skills, and/or library resources. A reflective essay, for example, can allow students to gather what they already knew, what skills they struggled with, and what they learned during a library resource scavenger hunt. Librarians and faculty should work together to determine appropriate assignments and assessment tools based on student and course needs.

Tips:

1. Share past experiences with faculty and teaching staff—both successes and failures—in assignment and assessment design.
2. Be bold. Do not be afraid to be adventurous or creative with design.
3. Consider using the backwards design model to design assignments and assessment tools based on students' needs and course learning objectives.

Syllabi & Assignment Collection

Collecting syllabi and assignments enhances librarians' abilities to provide class-specific instruction while also providing an avenue for faculty to contribute to library instructional design. McMillen Library has a long standing tradition of syllabi and assignment collecting. Faculty often send syllabi and assignments to the library as new courses are developed. The syllabi and assignments are filed at the reference desk of the library and are periodically updated. As librarians prepare for instructional sessions, they are encouraged to use the syllabi and assignment collection to develop course-specific instructional sessions.

Tips:

1. Request that faculty and staff submit syllabi, assignments, and other relevant course materials as part of the library instruction scheduling process.
2. Maintain an accessible archive of course syllabi, in-print or online, for librarians and library staff to access.

Conclusion

The library can create a vibrant learning environment that promotes academic, professional, and lifelong success by using a variety of methods to collaborate with faculty to redesign library instruction beyond traditional one-shot lecture-based instruction. Efforts to redesign library instruction at McMillen Library have opened the door to recurrent and embedded instruction, as well as project-based learning activities, and have increased the quality of library instruction, library instruction requests, and, most importantly, student satisfaction. Librarian-faculty collaboration to redesign library instruction reinforces course curriculum and learning objectives, fosters information literacy standards, promotes critical thinking and technology skills among students, and demonstrates librarians' aptitude in pedagogy and instructional design.

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Indiana Libraries, Vol. 33, Number 2

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