More than faculty training

Integrating information competence into the disciplines

by Ilene F. Rockman

I learned more than I ever imagined." "I realized how careful structuring of information can lead to less anxiety and stress for both the instructor and the students."

"One of the best workshops I took."

"A class act."

Are these comments from student course evaluations? Responses to a recent ALA preconference? On the contrary, they are representative of the enthusiastic reactions received from faculty members after attending a week-long summer workshop at California State University (CSU), Hayward, on "Integrating Information Competence into the Disciplines,"[1] which reaffirmed the important teaching role of librarians on campus.

Decades of faculty library instructional experiences have reinforced the belief that if undergraduate or graduate students are to be information literate and competent, then librarians must reach and teach faculty members in a sustained learning environment so that these important skills can be systematically incorporated into the classroom. In addition, in today's higher education environment, it is wise to promote information competence outreach efforts as a desirable campus-wide learning outcome, rather than as a "library issue."

Taking these perspectives to heart, CSU created and presented a highly successful faculty information competence workshop from July 12–16, 1999.

Conceived by the university library, in partnership with the campus Faculty Development Center, the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching, and Information and Computing Services, the workshop was underwritten with support from both the local Office of the Provost, and CSU's Commission on Learning Resources and Instructional Technology. The workshop was the campus's first comprehensive, university-wide effort to offer a supportive, nurturing, relaxed, team-based approach to faculty education on information competence.

Workshop goals

The goals of the workshop were simple—to provide discipline-based faculty members with the knowledge and skills they need to incorporate information competence principles into their coursework. Within a focused setting, faculty members worked closely with subject specialist librarians to revise a course syllabus, reshape an assignment, or redesign teaching materials according to information competencies principles defined by CSU.[2]

These core competencies can best be summarized by the ability to state a research question or problem, and then to find, organize, evaluate, use, and communicate information in all of its various formats. Imbedded in the competencies are computer literacy, respon-

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sible and ethical use of recorded knowledge, and reinforcement of critical thinking.

Planning and participant selection

Funds were secured in the fall of 1998, and promotional materials were distributed in the winter of 1999. Faculty members were selected in the spring of 1999 through an application process that asked them to identify the competencies most appropriate for their course(s), and how the learning experiences and academic outcomes of their students might be strengthened, enhanced, and expanded by incorporating such competencies into assignments, projects, or other course work.

Fourteen faculty members were selected from 29 applicants, and represented a wide range of disciplines, ranks, and years of service at the university. Both tenured and probationary, junior and senior, and undergraduate and graduate professors were selected. Disciplines included art, business, computer science, English, ethnic studies, human development, modern languages and literature, nursing, public administration, sociology, teacher education, and theatre arts. Having a mix of subject areas, as well as frequent and infrequent library users, added to the discussions, synergy, and richness of the workshop experiences.

After the selection process was completed, and before the workshop began, participants were sent a letter of welcome and a packet of materials. They were also added to a newly created, university-wide mail list so that they could get better acquainted with the competencies, the workshop goals, and with each other.

Workshop participants learn about information competence, adult learning theory, and problem-based learning.

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The workshop was scheduled for July 1999. At this time, each participant received a binder of materials, which included information helpful to the acquisition of skills and the cultivation of knowledge. Examples of materials included Bloom's Taxonomy to offer a conceptualization of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning, sample assessment tools and techniques, characteristics of situated learning, and recommendations for discouraging/handling plagiarism.

In addition, the workshop Web site was expanded to include additional library resources, such as links to information competence projects and reports, support materials for learning theories, criteria for evaluating Internet resources, and general support information, such as the World Lecture Hall.[3]

Workshop activities

The workshop itself took place in the library's electronic teaching classroom. Each of the day's activities was organized about specific competencies. Morning sessions covered principles of information competence, stimulating student curiosity, adult learning theory, student-centered interface design, determining the literacy components in specific disciplines, and problem-based learning. Talks were presented by librarians and/or guest lecturers, such as educational technologists.

Included in the presentations were examples of sample assignments, which generated much evaluative discussion in large and small groups. The catered lunch provided additional time to continue the conversations or to reflect on the morning sessions. Afternoons were spent collaborating with librarians to reshape assignments or course offerings.

On the fifth and final day of the

workshop, participants took center stage. They became the "teachers" by sharing their "before" and "after" assignments, explaining the rationale for changing their courses to include information competence principles, and providing time for questions so that all of us could share together in the discovery and learning experiences.

Why a success?

What made this workshop so successful? Several factors were mentioned by the participants—the uninterrupted summer time to devote to the topic; the collaborative, active, and resource-based learning experience; the setting of the hands-on electronic classroom in the library; the opportunity for faculty members to meet and work with each other (since several were new to the campus or recently returned from sabbatical leaves); the information explosion, which has made electronic information ubiquitous, ever-changing, and has overwhelmed many of the senior faculty members new to technology, increasing their desire to learn; the recognition that electronic resources have an increasing impact on and importance to the learning process; a desire to intelligently harness the power of the Internet, especially for those faculty members who teach in distributed learning/distant education environments, including overseas and online programs; the recent change in the campus General Education program, which encourages creativity and rethinking of curricular offerings, has resulted in the introduction of integrated thematic course clusters for all entering freshmen (such clusters include an information competence credit class taught by librarians); and the awarding of a laptop computer to each faculty participant upon the successful completion of the workshop.

From the perspective of the planners (two librarians, an educational technologist, and the director of the Faculty Development Center), the workshop's successes can be traced to the strong collaboration and partnership between the library and other campus units; the unwavering conviction that such a workshop could make a difference in the life of a student; the variety of workshop speakers, instructional strategies, course materials, and examples of "what's possible to achieve"; and the close professional and personal friendships on the campus between discipline-based faculty and library faculty members (librarians have faculty status).

Workshop participants and facilitators liked the collaborative learning experience.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants agreed to serve as mentors to their department and school colleagues; to facilitate an information competence workshop later this year for their peers, sponsored by the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching; and to attend a "class reunion" to share experiences about the results of their revised classroom materials.

In addition, several participants took the initiative to write letters to the provost praising the workshop organizers and strongly encouraging support for another workshop next summer.

As noted in the ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education,[4] faculty members inspire their students to explore the unknown and to offer initial guidance on how best to fulfill information needs. This workshop has increased their abilities to do so, and with librarians as collaborative partners, our students will reap the benefits many times over for years to come.

Notes

1. http://imctwo.csuhayward.edu/faculty_dev/infocompweb/cominfo.htm.

2. http://www.calstate.edu/ITPA/Docs/html/info_comp_report.html).

3. http://www.utexas.edu/world/lecture/.

4. http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilintro.html. ∎