
Developing a partnership in library instruction

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*A joint effort between school and academic librarians to
teach library skills.*

Most academic library instructional programs are aimed primarily at undergraduates, particularly the entering freshman students. While the content of these programs may vary from library to library the majority are designed to teach students to use catalogs, periodical indexes and abstracts, and to familiarize the students with the local facilities. Efforts to build on the bibliographic skills that students have acquired through library instruction at the high school level are chiefly ignored, resulting in academic librarians reteaching very basic skills. Consequently, little time is devoted to the teaching of new skills related to evaluating and managing information.

While efforts to streamline the content of instructional programs and to move them beyond the teaching of basic skills and concepts have been somewhat successful, total success is dependent upon building on the skills that students have acquired prior to entering college. This success is contingent on establishing a sequential program from high school to college. Obviously this will necessitate a joint effort by school and academic librarians.

In an effort to accomplish a more unified library instruction sequence through cooperation between high school and academic librarians, we applied for a grant through the Virginia State Library.

Funding for projects promoting interlibrary cooperation among all types of libraries was provided through the Library Services and Construction Act, Title III. The purpose of the grant program is to encourage all types of libraries to cooperate in improving the quality of library service by providing programs not currently being offered.

Our proposal, "A Cooperative Instruction Program for College-Bound High School Students in Southwest Virginia," was one of ten funded through this cooperative program in Virginia in 1985. The project is a cooperative effort for library instruction involving high school libraries and an academic library. The proposal suggests a program of library instruction for college-bound high school students in twenty-six counties of Southwest Virginia.

Institutions of higher education in Southwest Virginia attract a large part of their student body from the surrounding counties. By and large, these students are uninitiated in the use of a large library facility. At best they have been exposed to a school library collection or perhaps a small public library. Even those students who have had adequate instruction in the use of a library have had little opportunity to put these skills to use. As a result, library instruction in many academic institutions is characterized by "basic library skills" programs.

There is little opportunity to design programs that deal with the other vast problems of accessing, evaluating, and managing information.

The grant proposal will attempt to address two major problem areas. First, entering students lack the skills needed to use indexes, abstracts, and periodical literature in general and to interpret bibliographic information in catalog systems, indexes and abstracts, and bibliographies. Furthermore, they do not understand the concepts of authorship and classification of library collections.

Second, classroom teachers and school librarians seem to lack a clear understanding of the informational needs of entering students at an academic institution like Virginia Tech. For example, students may be taught how to use a specific classification system, such as the Dewey Decimal System, but may not be taught the concept underlying classification systems to enable them to transfer this knowledge to the LC system. In addition, most school librarians have not had the opportunities to update their knowledge of the latest developments in librarianship, particularly in the area of computer technology.

Students from these 26 rural counties are sometimes at a disadvantage in using libraries due to lack of exposure to larger library systems. This grant addresses the needs of these college-bound students in a variety of ways. By working closely with high school librarians and teachers, we will identify the library skills needed by students to use academic libraries. Training sessions for librarians

are being developed, instructional aids are being written, and a videotape is being filmed in an academic setting. All instruction will be designed to cover both the concepts behind information storage and access as well as fundamental library skills.

The distribution of teaching packets and videotapes as well as the scheduling of training sessions for high school librarians will be implemented through a clearinghouse established at the Virginia Tech Library. Plans are being made to ensure the maintenance and continuation of the clearinghouse. An initial survey among the school librarians within the geographic area covered by the grant elicited enthusiastic response and input, reinforcing the idea that this kind of joint effort is needed and welcomed. Planning and development will continue throughout the 1985-86 year. Training sessions and teaching packets will be available by the summer of 1986.

Ideally, a successful instructional program of any subject or discipline is designed to teach basic skills as well as concepts. Admittedly this has been a weakness of academic library instruction programs throughout the country. Efforts to establish a common base, especially at the public school level, will in the long run benefit academic library instruction programs. Helping school librarians to teach fundamental library skills to college-bound students will enable academic institutions to design programs that go beyond the teaching of basic skills and instead concentrate on teaching students to access and manipulate information. ■■

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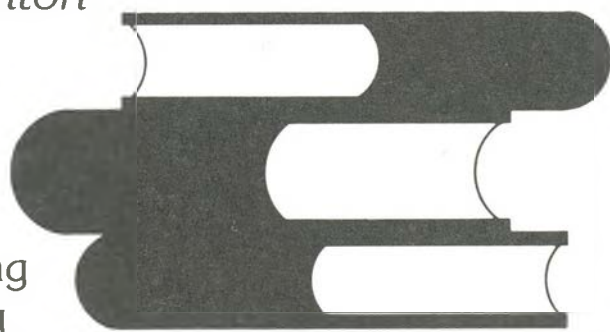
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