

If you build it, will they come?

Reaching out to faculty through information literacy instruction

by Melissa Moore

Throughout my ten years in academic librarianship, I have often spoken with fellow reference and instruction librarians who want to do bibliographic instruction (BI), now called information literacy instruction, for more students, in more disciplines, working with more faculty. Not because they don't have enough to do already (between helping staff the circulation desk and ordering interlibrary loans, answering general reference questions and learning new databases, making Web pages, and doing collection development in their academic disciplines), but because they truly believe in making lifelong learners of their students.

Frequently, though, librarians are at a loss as to how to reach beyond the introductory English class that is held every fall, or beyond those few faculty members who will actually voluntarily come to the library wanting instruction. How do we "sell" information literacy to faculty who believe they are too busy to give up a class period for the library or who assume students can differentiate between legitimate online research and a glossy, biased Web site? What about those professors who are afraid of the Web so they limit student research to what's in print? How do we reach them?

Become a student

A year after coming to Union University, I signed up to take a senior-level course in my undergradu-

ate discipline area (English). To make my life more difficult, I decided to take the course for graduate credit (so it might be worth something down the academic road). The professor decided she could kill two birds with one stone: she needed to "up" my amount of work to the graduate level, and she wanted her students to know how to do "real" research. The result was a three-course sequence of BI that covered reference materials, databases, and Internet searching—all focused on the specific requirements of the course (including a 20-page paper and a 100-source outline of world literature) and were supplemented by an annotated 7-page bibliography of relevant reference materials, a research assignment I wrote, and other appropriate research guides.

Take a course you would find interesting, "go after" a faculty member by signing up for a course in his or her specialty. You may not be called on to construct an elaborate BI session like I was, but it will enable you to develop a rapport with the faculty member and prove that librarians are intelligent and every bit the peer of teaching faculty. I will be teaching the same sequence for the eighth time this September, and the feedback each year is the same: "I wish I had known all this as a freshman." It doesn't get much better than that!

Use your course listing

At Union, it's very simple to see what courses will be offered (and by whom) the next semester. Nearly

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all our faculty have to teach freshman and/or sophomore-level courses each term, but they also typically have one or two upper-level courses for majors in the field. These upper-division courses are usually in their area of specialty, and the subject matter is of particular interest (and excitement) to them. If there is a special faculty member you want to reach, or a discipline you feel competent in but have no professional contact with, check your institution's course listings in that area. Pick up the phone (it's more personal than an e-mail) and call the professor, offering whatever you feel comfortable with for that course: an annotated bibliography of reference sources in that specialty; a Webliography of reputable and reliable sites on the subject matter; a list of the library's journal holdings relevant to that course; or even a tailored information literacy session in their classroom focused on their students' upcoming assignment.

Any of these will enable you to get your foot in the door and show the professor that you have skills he or she may not have (or may simply not have the time to use). Once that initial contact is made, you will be surprised by the follow-up phone calls you will receive in subsequent semesters.

One caveat: Do *not* spend hours preparing unsolicited material for a professor or class. My experience has been that you seldom get out of it what you put into it.

Talk to the professors who *do* use BI

Find out why professors who use BI regularly do so. Is it because they have a conference to attend and don't want to cancel class? Most likely, it's more fundamental than that. Those faculty who are willing to give you a class period (or more) believe that their students will be the better for it. The sacrifice they have made pays for the quality of research they see at the end of the assignment. Ask those professors (not in an official, evaluative way but informally) why they use BI. What results do they see? Where are those results? Are there things you do that they think other faculty could take advantage of if they knew about them?

I recently taught a local workshop on collaborating with faculty and had one of our history faculty members come and offer advice and take questions. He is a big library user, and he has called on me to provide resources for several courses over the last five years, from annotated bibliographies of children's litera-

ture to a list of reference materials on the American South. His advice to the workshop attendees? Pursue your faculty members. Advertise what you can do to help them. And then do it well. The faculty whom you think of as your biggest fans are a great resource; use them.

Research appointments

I serve as one of two reference librarians at Union. My colleague and I began a new initiative last fall called Research Appointments. The concept is to assign a full-time library staff person to each department in the university to serve as the contact person for that department and to assist students in conducting research.¹ This list has been distributed to all faculty and freshmen and is posted in the library. That way, faculty can refer students needing help with research to a specific library staff member. Students who are in the library trying to research an economics project and running into problems can refer to the posted list and ask at the front desk for the library staff member assigned to economics. If the library staff member is not currently available, the student can make an appointment (we usually allow 30 minutes) with the library staff member to receive one-on-one training in search strategies and learn how to use specific resources (print and online) in that discipline. It's a combination of subject-specific BI and the broader focus of making the student information literate, all at the level of the individual.

This particular project is geared toward the student, rather than the professor, but the latter serves as go-between. We have experienced some success with this project and seen it spread by student recommendation. We have two other librarians and two staff members with non-library degrees serving as contact persons with us, so that the load on the reference staff is not quite as great. And hey, if we have a significant success rate, we will have grounds for requesting additional professional staff!

Information literacy workshop

Finally, we offered an information literacy workshop last fall on our campus to interested students. It was a two-hour, introductory-level workshop offered four times in October to students, faculty, staff, or community patrons. The workshop was universal (not focused on a discipline) and covered such skills as Boolean searching, evaluating Web sites, and critical

thinking. We used ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards (2000) as a guide.²

When we first began throwing the idea of a workshop around a year ago, we asked 40 or so of our strongest faculty library/BI users if they thought the workshop would help their students, and if they would be willing to promote it to their students (since the workshop is voluntary). The response was extremely positive, with one faculty member insisting he would make it mandatory for his upper-division classes.

In reality, our turnout was not what we had hoped. Nearly 50 attendees came to the four sessions, including one faculty member (this on a campus of nearly 2,000 students). Several faculty members offered to give students extra credit if they attended one of the workshops, so it seems not all of the students actually came due to a personal desire to learn something. Nonetheless, this workshop taught us something. It is my feeling that distance from an assignment actually crippled this workshop opportunity. It is my hope that in the fall of 2003, instead of generic information literacy workshops, we can offer a few discipline-specific workshops.

I would like to offer workshops for English majors and History majors, and my colleagues are considering other disciplines for which they

might offer one, as well. Often we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes, and certainly this attempt would qualify as an "enlightening failure."

Conclusions

Thanks to library school, librarians have skills that many faculty members do not. Rather than adopt an us/them mentality, we need to come together with teaching faculty for the benefit of our students. Look for ways, whether through the classroom or outside it, to focus in on students' research needs and make your institution a place of true lifelong learning. And remember, the only failure is to quit trying. At Union University, we are still building, and faculty are still coming.

Notes

1. Our Research Appointments Project is adapted from the concept presented in "The disappearing reference desk" by Peter Giordano, Christine Menard, and Rebecca Ohm Spencer, *College & Research Libraries News* 62 (July/August 2001): 692-94, 700.

2. For ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards visit <http://www.ala.org/acrl/>, and click on "Standards and Guidelines." ■

Register now for "Information Literacy and Assessment" online seminar

The third seminar in the ACRL/TLT Group online seminar series on information literacy will be held July 14 to August 1, 2003.

"Information Literacy and Assessment" offers a sequence of three synchronous Webcasts to introduce four important activities and/or documents relevant to assessment of information literacy programs:

1. *Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy That Illustrate Best Practices;*
2. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education;*
3. the ARL SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills) Project; and
4. the TLT Flashlight Project.

With a practical focus, the seminar leaders will provide specific examples of how to use

these documents/activities and their associated ideas to conduct an assessment of information literacy programs.

Seminar leaders are: Debra Gilchrist, director of library/media services, Pierce College; Tom Kirk, library director and coordinator of information services, Earlham College; and Robin Zuniga, associate director of Flashlight Program, TLT Group.

For more information visit: <http://www.acrl.org/e-learning>. Discounts are offered for ALA and ACRL members and members of TLT Group subscriber institutions. A \$25 discount per registrant is offered to individuals registering from the same institution. Registration is open at: <https://www.tltgroup.org/ilws3registration.htm>.