

Stephanie J. Graves

Homeless instruction librarian

Surviving instruction during a library renovation

Recently, I became a “homeless” instruction librarian. In the summer of 2005 Morris Library at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale began a multiyear renovation and expansion project. A remote storage building was constructed to house 90 percent of the collections, staff was moved to alternate buildings on campus, and a delivery system for materials was set into motion. Only a small portion of the first floor library remained open to the public with reference, circulation, and reserves services.

The former library housed two classroom/conference room spaces and one computer classroom. However, the construction project meant that all library classroom space was now off limits. With the renovation project extending until fall 2008, teaching librarians had to find new homes for bibliographic instruction (BI) sessions and the five to ten sections of the credit-hour course taught by librarians. It was frightening to realize library instruction would be “homeless” for a period of three years. This article explores the implications of a renovation on library instruction and offers some insight for those who might find themselves in a similar situation.

Plan ahead

The bumper sticker and common office quip “a lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part” holds particularly true during library renovations. The typical faculty member will not give librarians additional advanced warning for an instruction session just because the library is under renovation. Nor will they think to check for availability of a wired classroom

space before they add library instruction to their syllabi. It falls to librarians to plan ahead for such situations. The sooner instruction librarians start planning, the better.

If a library renovation is eminent, try to find space, any space, that can be used as a classroom and claim squatters rights. Having a classroom that is controlled by the library will help librarians deal with the last minute scheduling conflicts and shortages of available campus classrooms during busy times.

Luckily, Morris Library was able to set up a temporary classroom with eight hardwired computers and additional seating for 12 more students in a building across campus. While the classroom space is less than ideal, at least scheduling is under the library’s control. In addition, the computers are library machines, programmed and maintained by library staff. The library can install needed software and update or replace computers as needed. Library systems staff can troubleshoot any technical problems. Any librarian who has taught in an unfamiliar computer lab can understand the attractiveness of maintaining a library-controlled computer classroom. Technical glitches that can disrupt instruction are kept to a minimum, and librarians can become familiar with both the hardware and software.

Even if the library is able to find a temporary classroom space, instruction librarians still need to . . .

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Make friends

Get to know the individuals and departments who run the campus computer labs. Take the appropriate people to coffee, and discuss the library's needs for space during the construction process. Exploit any relationships that the library may have with the campus IT (information technology) department. If there is a centralized office for classroom scheduling, make sure that needs and timelines are clear. Morris Library has been very lucky that those who run both the computer labs and the Language Media Center have been very accommodating. The classroom scheduling office has also been kind, although it is difficult to book classroom space on short notice for instruction sessions.

Library liaisons and instruction coordinators should also consider making nice with individual departments or colleges. Most buildings on our campus have some sort of computer lab space. Many are controlled at the departmental level, so it's necessary to speak to the department secretary to find out who to contact about scheduling. Most departments are sympathetic to our situation and are happy to help when they are able. They are less likely to be territorial if they already have a personal relationship with the librarian contacting them and feel their space will be used for a worthwhile purpose.

In fact, the exile of library instruction from the library proper creates a unique opportunity to market library instruction. By taking instruction to where they live and work, professors are more likely to notice instruction efforts and the volume of library instruction that is occurring in their discipline. Faculty are more likely to sit in on instruction sessions if they do not have to travel far from the comfort zone of their own building. Also consider inviting them to sessions taught for other professors in their department, which could be in a classroom down the hall from their office. By removing the physical distance between library instruction and the teaching faculty's immediate environment, librarians just might convert a few souls to information literacy.

Above all, providing library instruction without a library home means librarians have to . . .

Be creative

If laptops and wireless are available, it is possible to set up temporary computer classrooms. This strategy has worked with larger classes than our eight computer classroom can handle. When hands-on instruction is not possible given classroom limitations, I encourage students to schedule one-on-one consultations during my office hours or reference shifts. If computer lab space is not available during the class period, consider scheduling alternate times for students to meet at a lab. If the professor agrees, this lab time can be made mandatory.

Instant messaging (IM) appointments can also help supplement instruction when lab space is sparse. IM has the added advantage of providing instruction at the point of need (the "teachable moment"). Web boards and chat rooms in course management systems

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such as Blackboard can also be used for remote library instruction and supplemental activities.

Also, consider developing library instruction techniques that don't rely as heavily on technology. Perhaps this is the time to test a library trivia game or quiz show activity. PowerPoint slide shows with step-by-step screenshots can also substitute for a live online demo and may be e-mailed or posted to students for later review.

However you decide to provide for library instruction, be aware of these . . .

Possible pitfalls

It is tempting to tell the instructor, "Don't worry, I'll come to you." I call this the *portable library classroom model*. Be aware that this approach takes an enormous amount of time, patience, and troubleshooting skills. There are many variables out of your control once outside a familiar environment. After lugging a laptop and projector across campus, I often encounter classrooms with no data jacks, even though I was assured they would be there, classrooms without working electrical jacks, problems connecting to the wireless client, and failing equipment. Consequently, I have programmed the IT help desk number into the speed dial of my cell phone. It comes in handy.

To ensure a full 50 minutes for library instruction, plan to be in the classroom to set up and check equipment at least 20 minutes in advance. If there is a class scheduled in the room beforehand, however, this is not always a possibility. Make sure to check the availability of the room before agreeing to this approach with the instructor.

In addition to the technological difficulties with library instruction during renovation, there are also significant difficulties with teaching specific content. I often find myself in a classroom across campus far from print resources important to the discipline. It's impractical to lug a book truck to remote locations. To lighten the load, I select only the two or three most relevant titles to carry. I suggest taking a bound volume and an

unbound issue of a journal so students can visualize how periodicals are organized and what to look for on the shelves when they finally get to the library.

If there are specific landmarks within the library that I want them to be aware of, such as the reference desk, I take photographs of those items and include them in my presentation. Visual familiarity can go a long way toward decreasing anxiety.

Most importantly, the disruption that comes with a library renovation will mean that librarians must . . .

Adapt the way we teach

The uncertainty that comes with library renovations translates to even less time for instruction. Faculty and students alike will ask a multitude of questions about how to retrieve materials, what materials are still available to them, what features will be in the new building, and how long the construction process will take. The library staff may assume that they are doing a good job of disseminating information to the campus community, but instruction librarians will still spend the better part of their class period answering questions and alleviating concerns.

Be prepared to answer these questions and don't dismiss the faculty and students' curiosity. These are the stakeholders who can promote the library's services and serve as possible donors in the future. Their active involvement in the success of the library building can translate to the success of the library instruction efforts. This also gives librarians the opportunity to explain why the renovations were needed and how they will improve access.

Spending valuable instruction time answering renovation questions can be quite frustrating. Instead of trying to cram more information in less time, ask instructors if they can allot extra time to a renovation question-and-answer period. I have asked some professors to give me two time slots: one beginning session of 15 minutes at the end

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• **Sharing, Privacy, and Trust in our Networked World.** This report from OCLC surveys members of the public from six countries and library directors from the United States on social networking and privacy. The report covers both social networking sites and social media sites, and provides a revealing look at how the public uses and feels about these tools. *Access:* <http://www.oclc.org/reports/sharing/default.htm>.

• **Unit Structures.** This is the blog of Fred Stutzman, a PhD student in Information Science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Stutzman is a researcher and commentator on social networking sites, and offers balanced views on the place of social networking sites in academia. *Access:* <http://chimprawk.blogspot.com/>.

News

• **Friends: Social Networking Sites for Engaged Library Services.** Written by Gerry McKiernan, science and technology librarian at Iowa State University, Friends is a blog that selectively republishes social networking news that is relevant to librar-

ies. *Access:* <http://onlinesocialnetworks.blogspot.com/>.

• **Mashable.** The “world’s largest blog on social networking,” Mashable provides a constant stream of news on the ever-changing world of social networking sites. The blog covers a wide range of developments and is updated several times a day. Readers can subscribe to RSS feeds for news on particular sites, such as MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook. *Access:* <http://mashable.com/>.



• **Wired Campus Blog.** Produced by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, this blog covers a broad range of news stories on the impact of technology on education. *Access:* <http://chronicle.com/wiredcampus/>.

Notes

1. boyd, danah. (2006). social network sites: my definition, www.zephorias.org/thoughts/archives/2006/11/10/social_network_1.html. *zz*

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of a class period to address renovation issues and a 50-minute bibliographic information session the following class period to deal with library instruction. This tactic not only increases face time with the students, but it also allows students to consider follow-up questions for the second visit. I have found that most professors are willing to give up the additional 15 minutes at the end of one of their lectures to address students’ anxiety.

If your library remains open during the renovation, as ours has, it can be a very scary, dusty, and noisy space. Students may not want to come if they can avoid it. I see students every day who avoid using print materials if it means coming to the library or initiating a delivery from temporary storage. They are intimidated by the construction zone and convinced that retrieving print materials is an unmanageable task. If collec-

tions or services will remain in the library, start instruction sessions by acknowledging the students’ reluctance. Encourage professors to schedule tours and browsing time, offer incentives to get the students in the building, create assignments that pull them in, or organize rides to the storage facility. It will take extra effort to ensure that print materials are used.

Finally

There are as many ways to teach library instruction as there are librarians. The uncertainties of the library renovation have caused me to re-examine my teaching techniques and philosophies, as well as reconsider the needs of the users. While a library renovation poses unique challenges for instruction, those trials can lead to exploration and growth for instruction librarians. *zz*