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From Syllabi to Strategy: Leveraging Curriculum Mapping for Instructional Outreach

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines curriculum mapping as a strategic tool for new liaison librarians to build faculty relationships, align library instruction with curricular needs, and support student success. Using an action research approach, the study focused on the College of Education at a large research university. The project involved mapping degree programs and analyzing syllabi to identify high-impact courses for library integration. Curriculum mapping provided critical insights into academic programs, enabling targeted outreach and tailored instructional support. Results included a nearly threefold increase in instruction sessions, more than tripled student consultations, and sevenfold increase in faculty consultations over one academic year. Faculty feedback highlighted the value of scaffolded information literacy instruction and expanded digital resources. By offering a replicable framework, this article provides practical guidance for academic librarians seeking to enhance instructional impact and position the library as a key partner in teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum mapping, liaison librarian, academic libraries, information literacy, outreach

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Introduction

Liaison librarians serve as the primary link between academic programs and essential library resources, providing information literacy instruction, research support, and collection development services (Johnson, 2018). However, new liaison librarians often struggle to establish these critical faculty relationships, especially when managing multiple liaison areas or large departments (Huber & Wagner, 2023). New liaison librarians often wonder how to quickly learn the structure of their departments, where to focus outreach for the greatest impact, and how to embed library instruction effectively. One proven method for addressing these questions is curriculum mapping.

Archambault and Masunaga (2015) define curriculum mapping as a systematic analysis of a program's courses. By creating a curriculum map, librarians can visualize the program's overall layout and interconnections, revealing curricular structures, relationships, and teaching priorities (Bullard & Holden, 2006). This approach illuminates how students experience their discipline and increases librarians' awareness of the curriculum, enabling more strategic engagement (Archambault & Masunaga, 2015).

For new academic librarians, curriculum mapping offers both a broad program overview and specific course-level insights to guide outreach and instruction. It helps identify which courses align most closely with library services, providing clear starting points for faculty engagement (Bullard & Holden, 2006). Moreover, the mapping process deepens librarians' understanding of disciplinary priorities, informing their instructional design and collaboration efforts (Henson, 2023). By reviewing a department's degree requirements and assignments, librarians can pinpoint where library resources will enhance teaching and learning and use these insights to start meaningful conversations with faculty about the library's role in student success (Henson, 2023).

This article presents a case study illustrating how a new liaison librarian used curriculum mapping to guide instructional outreach within the College of Education at a large research university. Grounded in an action research framework, the project involved analyzing degree programs and course syllabi to identify high-impact opportunities for library engagement. The case study offers a replicable and scalable process for using curriculum mapping to build faculty relationships, embed instruction, and increase the library's visibility. By documenting this approach, the article provides practical guidance for academic librarians, particularly new liaisons, seeking to align their services with curricular needs and position the library as a key partner in teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Curriculum mapping is a systematic method used to evaluate the cohesiveness, sequencing, and alignment of a curriculum with desired educational outcomes (Jacobs, 2004). Defined by Jacobs (2004) as a tool to answer critical questions such as "Who is doing what?"

and "Are we operating effectively?" it enables educators to examine how different courses and instructional components relate within a program. By charting content, teaching methods, and assessments against learning goals, curriculum mapping highlights gaps, redundancies, and misalignments, offering a comprehensive perspective on how learning is structured and progresses over time (Buchanan et al., 2015; Archambault & Masunaga, 2015).

Development in K-12 Schools

The concept of curriculum mapping originated in K-12 education. English (1980) introduced it as a method to align the written and taught curriculum. In the late 1990s, Jacobs framed curriculum mapping as an ongoing process to ensure purposeful sequencing across grade levels (Jacobs, 1997). By 2000, curriculum mapping was widely used in K-12 schools to achieve horizontal and vertical alignment of content and skills (Jacobs, 2004). Academic librarians later drew on these principles to integrate information literacy into higher education curricula.

Syllabus Analysis in Academic Libraries

Academic librarians in the 1980s began examining course syllabi to gauge library integration. Rambler's (1982) pioneering study at Penn State found that 63% of the 162 syllabi analyzed required no use of library resources, indicating a serious underutilization of the library in coursework. Subsequent studies in the late 1980s and 1990s reported similarly low levels of required library research within courses (Lauer et al., 1989; Bean & Klekowski, 1993).

By the 2000s, librarians used syllabus studies to inform outreach and instruction on a more strategic level. Dewald (2003) analyzed business syllabi to uncover faculty expectations for research. Williams et al. (2004) showed that analyzing online syllabi could uncover many opportunities for libraries, ranging from collection development to instruction, and could generate ideas for deeper faculty collaboration. Similarly, Jeffery et al. (2017) employed text-mining software to analyze over 1,200 syllabi, identifying patterns of library use across departments. Their findings informed strategic outreach efforts, such as workshops and resource guides tailored to specific faculty needs. McAdams and Glauberman (2017) further showed how analysis could identify high-potential courses for library engagement. These efforts marked a shift from simply documenting low library use to proactively seeking ways to embed library instruction where it was missing.

By the late 2000s, syllabus analysis became more evidence driven. VanScoy and Oakleaf (2008) coded first-year course syllabi for specific research skill requirements and discovered that nearly all first-year students were expected to find research resources, evidence that virtually every incoming student could benefit from library instruction. Boss and Drabinski (2014) introduced a rubric-based syllabus analysis to identify courses where library integration

would have the most impact. Together, these studies laid the groundwork to expand from individual syllabi analysis to mapping entire curricula.

Expansion of Syllabus Analysis into Curriculum Mapping

The release of the Information Literacy Competency Standards by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000 and the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education in 2016 encouraged librarians to move beyond individual syllabi analysis toward program-level mapping. Bullard and Holden (2006) promoted curriculum mapping as a way to align library instruction with institutional learning outcomes and accreditation requirements. Similarly, Lampert (2007) urged librarians to weave information literacy into the fabric of academic programs instead of treating library sessions as isolated one-shots.

By the 2010s, librarians recognized curriculum mapping as a powerful strategy for information literacy integration. Booth and Mathews (2012) emphasized curriculum mapping as a powerful method to visualize the entire learning journey of students in a program and to identify pivotal points for library intervention. They noted that mapping provides insight into the steps, requirements, and communities a learner navigates in a degree path, revealing where library instruction or support would be most impactful (Booth & Mathews, 2012). This big-picture perspective moved librarians closer to the role of educational partners.

Buchanan et al. (2015) offered one of the most comprehensive guides to implementing curriculum mapping for information literacy programs. They outlined multiple pathways, from internally driven mapping (using library-generated data like instruction statistics or course guides) to collaborative mapping with academic departments, in order to chart where information literacy outcomes align with course curricula. Their research demonstrated that librarians could leverage existing data (e.g., course learning outcomes, accreditation standards, library usage patterns) or gather new information (faculty interviews, SWOT analyses) to map information literacy within curricula. The result was a set of strategies that librarians in various institutional contexts could adopt to integrate information literacy more systematically (Buchanan et al., 2015).

Impact on Library Liaison Work

Curriculum mapping has transformed liaison librarianship by shifting it from reactive service to proactive engagement with departments (Hubner & Wagner, 2003). By mapping course sequences and research activities, liaisons can anticipate needs, propose instruction at key points, and align collections with curricula (Miller, 2019).

Mapping can also be a catalyst for faculty collaboration. Moser et al. (2011) found that mapping information literacy skills across a college's curriculum not only identified collaborative possibilities with faculty but also made the curriculum more transparent to all stakeholders. In their project, librarians met with faculty to map where each of the ACRL

information literacy standards was introduced or reinforced in courses (Moser et al., 2011). This process revealed gaps and redundancies in information literacy coverage and opened conversations with faculty about shared goals for student learning. The act of creating a curriculum map became an outreach tool.

Locker and Whelan (2024) likewise observed that curriculum mapping can serve as a communication bridge to faculty. Even without a formal information literacy requirement, a curriculum map provided a concrete framework for liaisons to talk with faculty about where and how students are (or are not) encountering research instruction in the curriculum (Locker & Whelan, 2024). Librarians at Berkeley College involved faculty directly in developing department-specific curriculum maps, which were then made available on the library's website as a reference for both faculty and students (Ziegler, 2019).

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of curriculum mapping for liaisons is the ability to assess and maximize the library's reach among students. For instance, in one "impact mapping" project, liaisons combined quantitative data and qualitative reflections to map all points of information literacy engagement across the curriculum at a liberal arts college (Locker & Whelan, 2024). Their goal was to determine how many students the library was reaching and to target new interventions to fill the gaps. The mapping revealed which courses and student cohorts were receiving library instruction and which were overlooked due to the lack of a common information literacy requirement. Using this information, the liaison team could strategically prioritize classes or programs for outreach, ensuring a more equitable distribution of library support (Locker & Whelan, 2024). This "impact mapping" exemplifies how liaisons are using curriculum maps as both an assessment tool and a planning roadmap, guiding decisions on where to allocate instructional time for the broadest student benefit.

Similarly, Khailova (2021) demonstrated the value of mapping for scaffolding information literacy instruction across entire programs, and Buchanan et al. (2015) noted that curriculum-mapped approaches make instruction more systematic and comprehensive. Achieving such comprehensive coverage, reaching students across the curriculum in a coordinated fashion, rather than leaving instructional gaps, is a key measure of success for liaison librarians.

While previous studies demonstrate the value of curriculum mapping for embedding information literacy, many of these projects are complex, resource-intensive, and developed over several years. They often require collaborative planning, specialized expertise, or extensive faculty involvement, conditions that may not be feasible for new liaison librarians. Although curriculum mapping is not a new method, this case study presents a novel application by adapting the process into a simplified, action-oriented framework specifically designed for quick implementation by new librarians. Based on one librarian's experience applying this model in practice, the approach offers a replicable, scalable tool for initiating outreach and building

instructional partnerships. Designed to align with the iterative and time-sensitive nature of liaison work, it provides a practical starting point that can be expanded over time as librarians grow more comfortable in their role.

Institutional Context

The University of Alabama, an R1 research university, serves approximately 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students. University of Alabama Libraries supports these academic programs through four centrally located libraries: a main library housing library administration and general collections; a science and engineering library; a business library; and a special collections library. Seventeen subject specialist liaison librarians provide tailored services, including instruction sessions, workshops, reference consultations, collection development, digital learning object creation, and subject-specific resource curation. In Fall 2023, a new instructional design librarian (the author) joined the University Libraries information services team. Given their educational background and professional experience in K–12 education, they were appointed as the library liaison for the College of Education.

The College of Education at the University of Alabama serves 3,226 students (2,151 undergraduate and 1,075 graduate students) and has over 150 faculty members across six departments: Special Education; Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies; Educational Studies in Psychology, Research Methodology, and Counseling; Curriculum and Instruction; Music Education; and Kinesiology. Historically, the Education Library, located adjacent to the College of Education's main building, served as the hub for education-related scholarly work and curriculum materials. The library housed print and curriculum resources for education faculty and students, and its liaison librarian maintained a well-established presence within the College and the Education Library for over twenty years.

In Spring 2023, two significant changes disrupted this established relationship between the College of Education and UA Libraries. First, the Education Library building was closed and repurposed. Education materials were relocated to either the main library or the archival facility. Second, the long-serving liaison librarian retired. During their tenure, they had built strong relationships withing the College and maintained a consistent presence through both the Education Library and long-standing instructional collaborations. Although this history laid the groundwork for a generally positive perception of the library among faculty, the transition still posed considerable challenges. No formal documentation of the previous liaison’s outreach, instruction, or communication practices was available, and the closure of the Education Library meant that many of the points of contact and institutional knowledge were effectively lost. As a result, the author entered the role without clear pathways to faculty or an inherited structure to support engagement.

When the author assumed the liaison role in Fall 2023, they encountered several immediate challenges. As a first-time academic librarian, they needed to quickly adjust to a new

professional environment while building relationships from scratch. The recent closure of the Education Library had left many faculty and students uncertain about where to access resources and support. With the liaison now based in the main library, the once-familiar, convenient point of contact was no longer present. The author needed to establish trust and gain a clear understanding of the College's evolving instructional and research needs.

Initial outreach efforts included general emails sent to the College of Education's faculty listserv. However, these messages lacked the specificity and personalization necessary to capture the attention of busy faculty members. Without a deep understanding of the College's programs of study or current needs, these early outreach attempts failed to generate meaningful engagement. During their first semester, the author relied primarily on faculty reaching out for instruction or resource requests. By the end of the semester, the author had conducted only six library instruction sessions, seven individual research consultations with students, and two consultations with faculty.

Recognizing the low engagement numbers and the need to build connections within the College, the author adopted a more strategic approach to outreach. Drawing on their background as a K–12 educator and the demonstrated utility of curriculum mapping in both K-12 and higher education, they launched a curriculum mapping project to guide targeted outreach and instructional planning. This evidence-based strategy provided a structured method for quickly learning the College's programs and course offerings, while also laying the groundwork for scalable future engagement.

The curriculum mapping project was designed with three primary objectives: (1) To become familiar with the degree requirements and programs offered by each department within the College of Education. (2) To develop an outreach strategy that effectively engages faculty and students with library resources and instruction. (3) To pinpoint meaningful connections between course content, library resources, and instructional opportunities. The project launched in January 2024 with a target implementation date of July 2024, ensuring readiness to support faculty and students more effectively during the Fall 2024 semester.

Methodological Approach: A Case Study Framed by Action Research

This article presents a case study that documents the development and implementation of a curriculum mapping strategy by a new liaison librarian. The goal was to design an instructional outreach method that could be quickly implemented, iteratively refined, and scaled over time. Rather than conducting empirical research, this project employed a reflective, practice-based approach grounded in the principles of action research. While the author was part of a larger team of liaison librarians at their institution, this curriculum mapping project and resulting outreach efforts were designed and implemented solely by the author in their liaison role for the College of Education.

Action Research Approach

Action research is an inquiry process aimed at solving problems or fostering change while engaging in systematic research (LeMire & Graves, 2019). It is frequently used in practice-based disciplines because it enables practitioners to improve their work in real time while also generating insights that can inform future practice (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). It employs a spiral cycle of planning, action, observation, reflection, and re-planning (Kemmis et al., 2014). Action research was chosen for this project due to its focus on pragmatic improvement and the implementation of new processes (Jefferson, 2014; Dearborn, 2022). In this project, action research provided a flexible structure for developing and refining curriculum mapping as an outreach strategy. Each stage of the research process corresponded to a cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting, allowing the author to adjust and expand the approach as new insights emerged.

Roadmapping

The first step in the curriculum mapping project was to create a roadmap of the College of Education's degree programs. This aligned with the planning phase of the action research cycle and helped build a clear understanding of how the College was structured. For the author, roadmapping offered a practical way to quickly learn which departments granted which degrees, what courses were required, and how different programs were connected (Bullard & Holden, 2006). Roadmapping gave a big-picture view of the College, showing how programs were organized and how students progressed through their coursework. Required and elective courses were listed, and cross-listed courses were flagged to highlight their potential for broader instructional impact.

This process helped reveal patterns that might not have been obvious otherwise. For example, it showed which courses were shared across programs and which were commonly taken early in a student's academic journey. As Locker and Whelan (2024) note, roadmapping can uncover hidden opportunities for outreach by making program structures more transparent. For a new liaison librarian, it also builds confidence by creating a reference point that can guide outreach and instruction planning.

Tools and Implementation

Microsoft Excel was used to build the roadmap because it offered flexibility, scalability, and ease of use. Excel's search and filtering features made it easy to navigate the data, while its compatibility with Microsoft OneNote supported note-taking and long-term knowledge management. Storing the roadmap in the cloud also ensured that it could be easily updated, shared, or transferred to other staff as needed.

The roadmap was organized into separate Excel sheets for each department within the College of Education. Using the university's course catalog and departmental websites, the author documented each department's degree programs, beginning with undergraduate

programs and continuing through graduate-level offerings. To improve visual clarity, each degree program was color-coded. Under each program heading, required and elective courses were listed, including course numbers and titles. A separate column indicated whether a course was mandatory for the program. Cross-listed courses were marked with a star to highlight overlap across programs.

This structure brought together previously scattered information into one searchable, easy-to-use file. For the author, the roadmap served as a central reference point that supported outreach, instruction planning, and faculty engagement. It also demonstrated a clear investment in learning the academic structure of the College, which helped establish trust and credibility during early interactions with departments.

Syllabus Analysis

The second step in the curriculum mapping process was conducting a syllabus analysis to identify courses where library instruction or resources could be embedded. Syllabus analysis helps librarians evaluate courses for references to library usage, information literacy outcomes, and research-based assignments (Boss & Drabinski, 2013). Previous studies have shown that syllabi are reliable indicators of instructional opportunities for library integration (Dewald, 2003; Williams et al., 2004; VanScoy & Oakleaf, 2006; Dubicki, 2019). For new liaison librarians, syllabus analysis provides actionable insights that can guide targeted outreach and early engagement.

Smith et al. (2012) emphasize that reviewing syllabi allows librarians to offer services that are directly aligned with course needs, complementing faculty instruction and elevating the library's role from supplemental to essential. In this project, syllabus analysis was used to identify high-impact courses, such as those with research assignments or learning outcomes related to information literacy, so that outreach could be directed where it would be most meaningful.

Criteria for Syllabus Selection

Given the College of Education's nearly 400 courses, a systematic approach was required to narrow the scope for syllabus analysis. For the first round of syllabus analysis, it was necessary to limit the number of syllabi analyzed to fewer than 100 to ensure the workload was manageable for the project timeline. The initial roadmap was filtered using the following criteria:

1) Required Courses Only: Focusing on required courses ensured a higher likelihood of reaching all students within a degree program. This reduced the list to fewer than 300 courses.
2) Cross-listed or Foundational Courses: Courses that served multiple programs or introduced core disciplinary concepts were prioritized, narrowing the list to 155.

3) Frequency of Offering: Courses with less than three instances of offering across programs were excluded, leaving 68 courses for the final analysis.

Syllabi for these 68 courses were obtained the university's Simple Syllabus repository for review and evaluation.

Syllabus Rating Scale

Each syllabus was rated based on its potential for library instruction and resource integration. Rating was done using a modified version of the Principia study instrument employed by Rambler in her 1982 syllabus study. The Principia study instrument used a scaling category of "much," "some," "and "none" to measure library use across courses (Rambler, 1982). For this project, courses were evaluated for the presence and depth of research-related assignments and information literacy components.

Courses rated with a score of 1 were identified as having little potential for research involvement. These courses showed no explicit mention of research projects, information literacy, or library resources in the syllabus, and their assignments did not lend themselves to research-intensive activities. An example of such courses included those focused solely on practical application with no academic research components.

Courses rated with a score of 2 demonstrated moderate potential. These courses included small projects or assignments requiring basic research skills or access to library resources. Assignments often involved introductory research tasks or surface-level analysis. Examples included annotated bibliographies, presentations on educational theories, and the utilization of the school library collection for an author or book study.

Lastly, courses rated with a score of 3 exhibited high potential for research involvement. These courses featured substantial, in-depth research projects or assignments that were clearly connected to information literacy skills and library resources. They often included explicit learning outcomes related to research. Examples included literature reviews; original research studies; gathering, analyzing, and visualizing data; evaluating and analyzing theoretical frameworks; and program evaluations.

Each syllabus was assigned a numerical score and entered the Excel roadmap alongside the course name. For those rated 2 or 3, notes were added about assignment details, learning outcomes, and potential library resources (e.g., databases, LibGuides, tutorials). The spreadsheet also included the professor's name, semester taught, and a link to the syllabus. An excerpt from this curriculum map is included in Appendix A to illustrate how course ratings and instructional opportunities were documented.

Connecting Mapping to Outreach

The curriculum map was designed not only as an internal reference but also as a practical tool to guide outreach. Once courses with moderate or high potential were identified, the next methodological step was to prepare for engagement with faculty teaching those courses. The intent was to use the curriculum map as evidence when initiating conversations, ensuring that outreach was targeted, course-specific, and directly connected to departmental needs. In this way, the methodology extended beyond analysis to include a deliberate plan for applying the map in practice as a foundation for relationship-building.

While the methodology provided a structured approach for developing the curriculum map and planning outreach, the process was not without constraints. As with any practice-based project, certain challenges emerged that shaped how the methods were applied in practice and highlighted the constraints of this first iteration of the project. These challenges are outlined below to provide context for interpreting the outcomes.

Challenges and Limitations

Like any practice-based project, this curriculum mapping initiative encountered several challenges that will shape future iterations. One notable limitation involved the variability of syllabi. The initial analysis treated each course as a single unit, assuming consistency across all sections. However, while course-level learning outcomes were generally consistent, assignment details varied significantly between instructors. This variation occasionally made it difficult to determine the level of research engagement a course truly required. As Dewald (2003) similarly observed, syllabi can differ widely in structure and depth, even when covering the same course content. Moving forward, each course section will be treated as a distinct case to account for these differences more accurately.

A second challenge was the inconsistent quality and completeness of syllabi. Some documents provided detailed descriptions of assignments and learning outcomes, while others included only general language or minimal information. In these cases, assumptions were sometimes necessary. As Beuoy and Boss (2019) point out, the strength of syllabus analysis is directly tied to the quality of the syllabi being reviewed. In future cycles, the author plans to follow up with instructors to clarify assignment expectations when syllabi are vague or incomplete.

Finally, while the project benefited from access to a university-wide syllabus repository, this level of access is not universal. Not all institutions make syllabi publicly available or easily searchable. In contexts where syllabi are restricted or inconsistently archived, librarians may need to request them directly from faculty, which could limit the scope of the mapping process or delay its implementation. This should be considered when adapting this model to other institutions.

These limitations reflect the iterative nature of action research. Each cycle of planning, implementation, and reflection surfaces new questions and opportunities for refinement. The lessons learned through this initial mapping process will inform more nuanced, inclusive, and accurate approaches in future iterations.

Outcomes

The syllabus analysis encompassed 68 courses within the College of Education and provided valuable insights into where library instruction and resources could be integrated. Of the courses reviewed, 54.4% (37 courses) were rated as having high potential for library connection, 29.4% (20 courses) as moderate potential, and 16.2% (11 courses) as little to no potential. Graduate-level courses accounted for 93% of those rated as moderate or high potential, reflecting the College's emphasis on research at the graduate level and its more practice-based focus at the undergraduate level. These findings helped the author prioritize outreach efforts where library instruction could have the greatest impact.

Faculty Engagement through Curriculum Mapping

The curriculum map also served as the foundation for targeted faculty outreach, creating structured opportunities to build relationships and embed library support. This stage aligned with the "action" phase of the action research cycle, as the author began putting the plan into practice through direct engagement with stakeholders.

Department Head Meetings

The first outreach activity involved in-person meetings with department heads during Summer 2024. These face-to-face meetings served as initial introductions and provided an opportunity to share findings from the curriculum mapping project. Department heads offered helpful context, including how courses were structures and how student cohorts were organized. They also shared insights about faculty specializations and departmental needs, as well as suggestions for student groups that might benefit from library support. In some cases, department heads described how the previous liaison librarian had worked with their department, which helped the author understand existing expectations and identify areas for growth. Notes from these meetings were recorded in a shared OneNote notebook, organized by department for ongoing reference. These meetings positioned the author as an active partner by demonstrating investment in the academic structure of the College.

Faculty Outreach

The second outreach activity focused on reaching out to individual faculty members teaching courses identified in the curriculum map as having moderate or high potential for library instruction. These faculty were contacted by email during the first week of August 2024. Each message included a brief introduction, a summary of relevant library resources tailored to

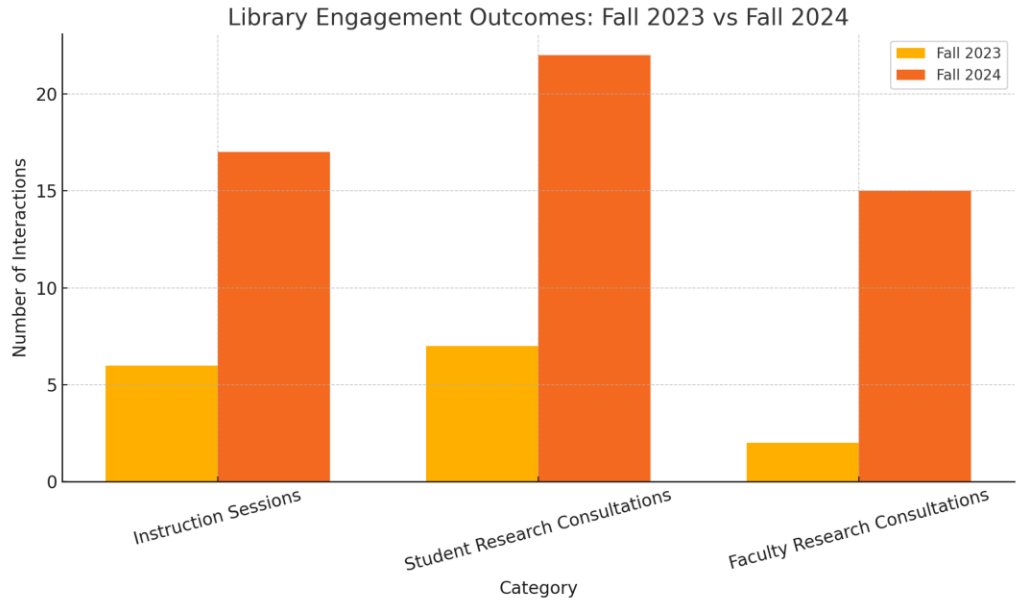
course assignments or learning outcomes, and an invitation to schedule library instruction. The emails emphasized practical value and made it easy for faculty to follow up. The goal was to demonstrate familiarity with their course content and suggest actionable ways the library could enhance instruction. A sample outreach email is included in Appendix B.

Growth in Instruction and Consultations

This outreach led to measurable increases in engagement. Forty-three personalized emails were sent to faculty teaching courses identified as having moderate or high potential. The outreach efforts led to 17 invitations to provide library instruction, which was nearly triple the number of sessions conducted during Fall 2023. Additionally, 19 faculty members embedded recommended LibGuides or video tutorials into their course shells, and all respondents agreed to share the author's contact information and appointment scheduling link with students.

Student and faculty engagement also increased significantly. Individual research consultations with students rose from seven in Fall 2023 to 22 in Fall 2024. Faculty research consultations increased from 2 to 15 during the same period, creating additional opportunities to support faculty research and strengthen departmental relationships. The growth in engagement is illustrated in Figure 1. These early outcomes suggest that curriculum mapping can provide an effective structure for aligning outreach with curricular needs. Although limited to one academic year, the results indicate promising directions for strengthening the library's presence in courses and programs across the College of Education.

Figure 1. *Illustrates the increase in library engagement outcomes between Fall 2023 and Fall 2024, following the implementation of the curriculum mapping project. Metrics include instruction sessions, student research consultations, and faculty research consultations.*



Discussion

The curriculum mapping project yielded valuable insights into the College's program structure and faculty expectations for student research. By reviewing course objectives and assignments, the author gained a clearer understanding of how students progress through their programs and where research skills are emphasized. These insights informed both the design of the outreach and the creation of new instructional strategies.

Macro- and Micro-Level Insights

This project affirmed the findings of Beuoy and Boss (2019), who emphasized that curriculum mapping provides both macro- and micro-level perspectives on academic programs. At a macro level, the curriculum map offered a bird's eye view of students' paths through their degrees and highlighted key courses where library instruction would have the greatest impact. This informed strategic outreach priorities and ensured instructional support was offered at critical points in the curriculum. At a micro level, the syllabus analysis uncovered specific research assignments and course-level expectations that helped the author develop targeted resources, such as course-specific LibGuides and tutorials. This dual perspective allowed for a more intentional, layered approach to outreach and instruction. These perspectives also provided a useful entry point for conversations with faculty about aligning library support with curricular needs.

Faculty Conversations and Emerging Needs

A primary objective of the project was to spark meaningful conversations with faculty about how the library could better support their needs. The curriculum map proved invaluable for this, serving as both an information resource and a discussion starter. Over the summer, the author met with department heads to share findings from the mapping project. These conversations led to invitations to present at three departmental faculty meetings during the fall semester. They were also invited to present at the College's monthly brown-bag seminar. These opportunities increased the visibility of library services and helped position the author as a resource not only for students but for faculty development as well.

Through these discussions, two important needs emerged. First, faculty expressed clear interest in moving beyond traditional one-shot instruction sessions toward more scaffolded approaches to information literacy. Traditional one-shot sessions gave a broad overview of resources but often resulted in repetitive content and did not adequately address students' evolving research needs. Faculty noted that library orientation and one-shots often cram too much information into a short period, leaving students overwhelmed or disengaged. This feedback aligns with cognitive load theory (Paas et al., 2003), which emphasizes the importance of managing complexity to support meaningful learning. These conversations underscored the

need for instruction that is developmentally aligned and delivered in smaller, more relevant segments across students' academic trajectories.

Second, faculty identified areas where digital resources were lacking and where awareness of existing tools was limited. For example, there was a LibGuide for qualitative research methods but none for quantitative methods, and departments like Kinesiology and Counseling lacked subject-specific guides. Additionally, many faculty in Curriculum and Instruction were unaware of the school library collection and children's literature databases that could benefit their students. These observations suggest a dual need: to expand and update digital resources and to better promote and contextualize the tools already available to faculty and students.

Reflection and Relationship-Building

Taken together, the project outcomes and faculty feedback demonstrate that curriculum mapping served not only as a method for data collection, but also as a framework for reflection and relationship-building. The increased instruction sessions, consultations, and embedded resources, combined with faculty calls for scaffolded instruction and stronger digital support, highlight how mapping can function as both an evidence-gathering tool and a catalyst for collaboration.

Through this process, the author was able to engage in meaningful conversations with faculty, support curriculum-aligned instruction, and establish a foundation for future outreach initiatives. These initial findings reinforce the value of using curriculum mapping as a starting point for strategic, relationship-driven liaison work.

Implications for Practice

This project offers a practical and replicable model for new academic librarians seeking to understand their liaison areas and build meaningful connections with faculty. Once of the most significant contributions of this approach is its focus on quick implementation. By using readily available information, such as course catalogs and syllabi, librarians can independently gather the insight they need to begin outreach.

One aspect of curriculum mapping that makes it particularly appealing for new liaison librarians is its ability to be conducted independently of faculty input. According to Archambault and Masunaga (2015), it empowers librarians to take ownership of their subject area without demanding faculty time upfront. This autonomy makes curriculum mapping not only a strategic tool, but also a proactive approach to outreach, which is especially valuable in settings where relationships are still being established.

For new academic librarians, curriculum mapping offers a systematic and proactive way to understand the structure and needs of their departments while developing outreach

strategies. However, the process can seem daunting at first. There are multiple approaches described in the literature, and it can be difficult to know where to begin (Olsen et al., 2023). Novice liaisons must interpret existing models, learn how to identify relevant information literacy connections, and then determine how to apply those insights within their own institutional context.

Experts suggest starting small with a clear, defined goal. A curriculum map can be simple or complex depending on its purpose, and new librarians benefit from identifying one key objective to guide their first iteration (Butterbrodt, 2020). It is also helpful to view the map as a living document that evolves over time. Rather than trying to address every need at once, new liaisons can begin with a basic roadmap and then gradually build in more layers, like course-level research expectations, instruction timelines, or threshold concepts, as they become more familiar with their department and its curriculum.

This project also illustrates the value of using curriculum mapping to target outreach and personalize faculty engagement. Instead of sending general announcements or relying on passive service models, the author used course-level data to craft tailored emails that spoke directly to faculty needs. This strategy led to significant increases in instruction sessions, research consultations, and faculty collaborations in just one academic year.

The findings also highlight two areas of professional practice that deserve continued attention. First, faculty feedback made clear that traditional one-shot instruction is not meeting the evolving research needs of students. Moving forward, librarians can use curriculum mapping data to design scaffolded, developmentally aligned instruction that supports learning in manageable, context-specific segments. This includes building tiered instruction across graduate programs and aligning content with student research milestones.

Second, the project revealed gaps in both the availability and visibility of digital learning resources. Curriculum mapping can help identify where subject-specific guides, tutorials, or asynchronous tools are missing, as well as guide outreach to raise awareness of existing resources. As academic libraries continue to expand their digital offerings, targeted development and promotion of these materials will be essential to supporting student learning at scale.

Ultimately, curriculum mapping can be a highly effective tool for liaison librarians, not just for instructional planning, but for building lasting relationships within academic departments. By aligning library services with curricular needs, librarians can shift from reactive service providers to strategic partners in teaching and learning.

Next Steps

Action research is inherently cyclical, emphasizing reflection continuous improvement, and the flexibility to adapt strategies based on emerging needs. The curriculum mapping project

described here represents the first iteration of a living process that will evolve in response to new insights, faculty feedback, and curricular changes within the College of Education.

The next phase of the project will focus on aligning library instruction more closely with course learning outcomes through the integration of threshold concepts from the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy. Drawing on the mapping work of Khailova (2021), the author plans to connect program-level outcomes with information literacy instruction to ensure students receive timely, developmentally appropriate support throughout their academic journey.

Scaffolded instruction will be piloted with at least one graduate cohort, combining in-person workshops, asynchronous content, and curated digital learning objects. This approach directly responds to faculty concerns about the limitations of one-shot sessions and reflects a growing demand for sustained, layered engagement across programs. Recognizing the limitations of providing instruction for all courses, future iterations will focus on strategically supporting high-impact courses identified through curriculum mapping. This ensures that limited instructional time is directed where it can have the most meaningful impact on student learning.

Additionally, the digital learning infrastructure will continue to expand. The syllabus analysis and faculty feedback identified gaps in subject-specific guides and tutorials, as well as missed opportunities to promote existing tools. New resources will be developed in collaboration with departmental faculty and shared through targeted outreach strategies. Future iterations of the curriculum map will incorporate feedback loops, expanded analysis of course sections, and ongoing evaluation of instruction outcomes. By using action research to guide these developments, the author can continue to adapt and refine the model in ways that are both context-specific and scalable.

Conclusion

Curriculum mapping offers new liaison librarians a structured strategic approach to learning their departments, identifying instructional opportunities, and building faculty relationships. As demonstrated in this project's first year, even a simplified curriculum map, grounded in publicly available course data and analyzed through an action research lens, can produce promising gains in outreach, instruction, and engagement. While these results are preliminary, they highlight the method's potential for broader application.

By reviewing program structures and analyzing course syllabi, the author was able to identify high-impact courses, tailor outreach to faculty needs, and embed instruction at critical points in the curriculum. These actions led to a significant increase in instruction sessions, student consultations, and faculty collaborations in just one academic year. Faculty feedback

also revealed deeper instructional needs, including a desire for scaffolded support and more robust digital learning tools, which are insights that will guide future work.

This case study reinforces the value of curriculum mapping not only as a planning tool but as a means for reflective practice and relationship-building. Framing the project within an action research methodology allowed for an iterative, flexible process that responded to real-time challenges and faculty needs. Each cycle of analysis and outreach produced new insights, leading to informed adjustments and continued growth.

At its core, curriculum mapping can serve as a powerful entry point for new academic librarians. It transforms passive service models into proactive engagement strategies and positions librarians as educational partners within their departments. In a rapidly evolving academic landscape, this approach offers a scalable, adaptable framework for delivering instruction that is intentional, inclusive, and aligned with the curriculum.

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Appendix A

Curriculum Map Excerpt from Special Education EdD Program

Course Number	Course Name	Req.	Rating	Sem.	Prof.	Assignment(s)	Learning Outcomes Related to Information Literacy	Library Connections	Library Resources	Lesson Plan	Syllabus
BER 540**	Statistical Methods in Education	X	2	Fall	C.P.	Series of assignments using SPSS	Students shall be able to recognize the importance of data collection, identify limitations in data collection methods, and determine how they affect the scope of inference. • Students shall be able to use statistical software to summarize data numerically and visually, and to perform data analysis.	Look into collaboration with Research Data Services librarians. Possibly put together either a course LibGuide or include an SPSS page in a Quantitative Methods LibGuide. Investigate what statistical software is being used in class.			Syllabus link
BER 555**	Measure and Evaluation: Social and Behavior	X	2	SPR	H.S.	Instrument Analysis and Development Project Locate and analyze published assessments and design an assessment for use with evaluation of the area of need with the participating population. Annotated Bibliography covering all major topics (modules). Locate at least 3 additional sources per module topic, for 20 or more entries in the annotated bibliography	Students will show evidence of the ability to determine the quality of an instrument focusing on validity, reliability, fairness, practicality, efficiency, and bias.	Advanced database search skills	APA Psych Tests database; education databases; Mental Measurements database		Syllabus link
BER 600**	Survey of Educational Research	X	2	SPR, SUM	C.P.	This course is all about qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The course is set up in modules and includes provided readings and course text. Syllabus alludes to an individual project (which could be a literature review), but there isn't enough info in the syllabus to determine if students will use library resources.	• Students will explain basic concepts related to research design. • Students will describe appropriate applications and limitations of common quantitative data analysis techniques, as well as their limitations. • Students will critically evaluate research products, including published articles. • Students will produce written research products that reflect sound research design principles.	Will need to reach out to professor for more information on individual project requirements	Sage Research Methods Database; Qualitative Research LibGuide		Syllabus link
BER 660**	Evaluation I: Theory and Practice	X	2	Fall, SPR	S.M.	Project: Select one of the program evaluation designs in the book. Next, write-up a real or hypothetical program evaluation design including the required information discussed in the textbook for that	Students will be able to understand the vocabulary and standards of program evaluation • Students will differentiate between types of evaluation models • Student will develop a program logic model that summarizes a program's promises • Students will identify	Unknown at this time. Need to reach out to professor to inquire if students need to conduct outside research for program evaluation project.			Syllabus link

						type of evaluation design. (It is unknown if students will need to find outside research to support their program evaluation or if all information can be found in class textbook and materials.)	health behavior theories to inform program actions and guide evaluation of outcomes • Students will apply health promotion research methods to program evaluation • Students will identify appropriate data sources for program assessment • Students will identify, adapt or create quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments • Students will create an evaluation plan for a program/organization				
SPE 593**	Intro to Severe & Profound Disabilities	X	2	Fall	S.M.	Analytic Memos (5)	Recognize the differences between key historical and current philosophies of services, curriculum, and instruction for students with severe/profound disabilities. Review the research and benefits of family and school collaboration Analyze current federal and state laws and regulations governing and/or impacting programs for students with severe/profound disabilities Understand the legal rights of persons with severe/profound disabilities Identify definitions of severe disabilities, the role of the supports model in understanding students with severe disabilities, and the influence of societal perceptions and social interactions. Identify areas where progress has been made in providing individualized supports for people with severe disabilities in inclusive communities, and areas where work is still needed. Identify the influence of societal perceptions and social interactions.	Half of this class is practicum. However, the first part of course focuses on history, research, and best practices in special education. This could connect with searching education databases, especially History of Disabilities.	History of Disabilities databases and other ed databases		Syllabus link
SPE 600**	Doctoral Seminar in Special Education	X	2	Fall, SPR	L.B.	Required for 1st year doctoral students as they begin their program. Must write research statement, conference proposal, and conference presentation in area of special education.		Introduction to library resources for the PhD student; Zotero, Publication Finder; RDS; advanced search techniques; how to filter by conference presentations	Advanced searching tutorial; Citation LibGuide; Citation Managers tutorials	SPE600PPT	Syllabus link
SPE 597**	Transition in Special Education	X		SPR	L.B.	Module Reflections; Case Study in Transition		Help with finding specific articles on transition services in special education; overview of library resources	Advanced searching tutorial	SPE597PPT	Syllabus link

SPE 606**	Topical Seminar in Special Education	X	3	Fall, SPR, SUM	M.F.	Systematic Literature Review Complete some of the steps for conducting a research synthesis. This includes developing a rationale for your topic; determining search terms and inclusion criteria; locating articles that meet your inclusion criteria; completing a codebook and codesheet; coding of 6 included articles; preliminary synthesis of the results including a summary table; and discussion of the implications for research and practice.	• Conduct a systematic review of the literature, including: Identifying a topic of importance based on the literature; conducting a search of the professional literature for articles on the selected topic; identifying variables of interest to extract from the identified literature; writing the introduction and methods section of a systematic review; presenting findings. • Synthesize professional literature in special education, including historical trends and current issues affecting individuals with disabilities: classification, multiculturalism, early intervention, assessment, academic & behavioral interventions and so forth. • Effectively read research studies. • Summarize information from articles on a similar topic to identify themes across the literature. • Develop skills related to scholarly presentations. • Draft a proposal to present research at a scholarly conference. • Develop and present a conference-like presentation.	Advanced database searching skills; developing advanced search strings; qualitative coding software; systematic literature review protocols and templates	Systematic Literature Reviews LibGuide; Systematic Review Workshop Series; NVIVO workshop and LibGuide; instruction with advanced database searching		Syllabus link
SPE 613**	Consult Process for Special Ed Programs	X	1	Fall	E.N.	No library related assignments					
SPE 616**	Advanced Professional Dev	X	1	SUM	L.B.	No library related assignments					
SPE 617**	SPE Leadership	X	2	SUM	D.S.	Final paper Write a ten-to-fifteen-page paper on what you consider the most pressing issue in terms of special education policy and law.		Advanced searching skills using education and legal databases	ERIC database; Education Source Ultimate; Nexis Uni; ProQuest Legislative Insight		Syllabus link
BCE 542	Medical Aspects										
SPE 699**	Dissertation Research	X	3	SPR	L.B.	Independent research as students work on their dissertations.	Due to the flexibility of course, students' research needs will vary.	Reach out to professor to share contact info with students to schedule individual research consultations if needed.			

* Denotes course is cross listed twice across programs

** Denotes course is cross listed three or more times across programs

Appendix B

Example Email to Faculty

Dear [insert faculty member's name],

My name is Melissa Herzberg, and I'm the new liaison librarian for the College of Education. I joined UA Libraries last year and have been working on ways to better connect library resources and services with courses in the Department of Special Education. As part of this effort, I've been reviewing syllabi across the College to identify opportunities where the library can offer meaningful support. Based on the assignments and learning outcomes in your course, BER 600: Survey of Educational Research, I believe there are some great possibilities for collaboration.

As a foundational course in the graduate program, BER 600 introduces students to graduate-level research practices. One of the key assignments in your course, a comprehensive annotated bibliography, offers a strong opportunity for library support. The library's Annotated Bibliography Research Guide (https://guides.lib.ua.edu/annotatedbibliography) provides students with step-by-step guidance on how to approach this assignment. For students who are new to academic research, I also recommend exploring the database SAGE Research Methods, which is designed to help students understand research design, methodology, and analysis. The library offers a SAGE Research Methods Guide (https://guides.lib.ua.edu/sageresearch) that walks students through how to use this resource effectively.

I'd be happy to visit your class to offer a short session on strategies for searching academic databases and locating peer-reviewed sources. If you're interested in scheduling instruction or discussing other ways we can collaborate, feel free to reach out. You're also welcome to share my contact information below with your students. I'm happy to meet with them individually for research support.

Sincerely,

[insert contact information]