

Teaching to Teach

Developing a Collaborative Instruction Training Program for MLIS Interns

Learning how to teach as an academic librarian can take many forms. Some are thrown into the deep end with little to no support. Some use pure grit to work through crippling fear of public speaking and feelings of imposter syndrome. Some, although probably very few, come to academic librarianship with actual teacher training and an understanding of pedagogical theory and effective instruction strategies. While everyone's journey to becoming a confident, effective instructor is unique, there are limited opportunities for mentorship and training across the field. At Loyola University Chicago (LUC) Libraries, a collaborative and differentiated instruction training program was developed for MLIS interns with the goal to provide support during the process of learning to teach.

The overarching purpose of the intern program is to provide rare, paid opportunities for MLIS students to get professional experience teaching, providing research services and participating in diverse projects that will assist in career placement after graduation. The program also provides essential support for the research and learning department at Loyola Libraries. The first cohort started in fall 2017 with two interns and currently runs with four interns. In March 2020, the 2019–2020 cohort transitioned to a remote working model through May. The COVID-19 pandemic and library budget cuts then stalled the program in 2020 for two years until it was revived for the 2022–2023 academic year. Participants come from a variety of mostly online MLIS programs, including the University of Illinois–Urbana Champaign, Dominican University, and University of Alabama.

One of the internship's core responsibilities is providing consistent and engaging information literacy instruction for the first-year writing course (University Core Writing Responsibly, or UCWR). The interactive information literacy sessions focus on exploring and evaluating search tools, topic development, and strategic searching with built-in formative and summative assessment strategies. There are also other opportunities for interns to teach outside of the UCWR course, including more general instruction sessions for Arrupe College (a two-year degree program at LUC), the ESL program, other colleges with assists from subject specialists, workshops, and high school groups.

Benefits and Challenges of Internships

Internships for MLIS students provide a variety of benefits. In several surveys of both interns and librarians, internships were cited as valuable for both confidence and experience

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in the field. Additionally, they helped students discover the unique role that academic librarians play as liaisons and researchers and gave them valuable assistance with career development.^{1,2}

Research on this topic especially shows benefits from instruction experience. One program was cited as giving students the opportunity to use skills they learned in their LIS programs in actual classrooms, and another found that interns with instruction skills were able to use these skills to improve their reference abilities, and vice versa.^{3,4} Interns seek and value instruction opportunities, with one student mentioning that they wished they had more chances to instruct, and others recognizing how instruction connected them with faculty and the university as a whole.^{3,4}

These internships were not without challenges. While one survey highlighted the time requirement for training new interns, a review of another program found that library graduate assistants were eventually able to save librarians time by taking on some of their instruction tasks.^{5,6} Reviews of LIS mentorships and methodologies found that relational issues could be reduced by flexible mentorship styles as there is no one superior mentorship method, with an ideal method including elements from multiple methods.^{7,8}

Instruction Training Program

The training for teaching UCWR library sessions is an ongoing process that happens over the entire course of the internship in several phases.

Phase	Elements
Independent	Review of curriculum Exploration of library search tools
Collaborative	Training with UCWR teaching librarians Shadow UCWR sessions Practice with fellow interns
On-going	Check-ins with supervisor (formal and informal) Feedback from instructors Reflection

The first phase of the training is largely independent—interns have access to a very detailed LibGuide that includes all of the content needed to prepare for the sessions. Interns can independently review slides for each of the presentations, scripts and videos of past interns conducting the content, as well as guided activities for learning and understanding Loyola Libraries' search tools.

The next phase of training is much more collaborative. First, the interns take part in a joint training session with the entire UCWR instruction team, led by the intern supervisor. This team includes staff with many different levels of experience with teaching—some librarians had been teaching for decades, while others had just been hired a semester or two ago. The training involves going through the instruction session content together and then practicing and discussing how one would teach the content. The interns also meet early in the process with just each other to brainstorm, talk through hesitations and worries, and practice with each other. The last part of the collaborative training phrase is to set up shadowing sessions with librarians to observe UCWR sessions. UCWR teaching staff are happy to let interns observe multiple sessions, and this provides the interns with examples of distinct teaching styles and techniques to help them in developing their own teaching style.

The training does not stop after the interns have started teaching; rather, it is an ongoing process as they continue to teach. Specifically, this ongoing training includes both informal and formal check-ins with the intern supervisor, feedback from instructors, and opportunities for reflection. Check-ins are important opportunities to go over what went well in each session as well as what felt confusing or difficult. These happen casually after each session as interns and most librarians share an office, as well as through monthly one-on-one meetings with the intern supervisor. These check-ins provide important opportunities for support not only from the intern supervisor but also from other library staff.

There are also opportunities for getting feedback from instructors and students as a part of ongoing training. Interns can reach out to instructors after each session to get feedback and then incorporate that into further sessions with the support of the intern supervisor. Additionally, there are opportunities for feedback in the sessions themselves—students can ask any clarifying questions and communicate what was confusing about the session before it is over. Interns can see right away the effectiveness of their teaching.

Last, an important aspect of the ongoing training process is reflection. Interns are given specific questions to reflect on after each session, such as “How do you feel you did?” and “What strategies or techniques did work? What didn’t?” This aids interns in developing their own teaching philosophy.

Supervisor Insights: Terri Artemchik

Organization and documentation are vital to the success of an instruction training program. I took effort in the first iteration of the internship to document everything. Much of that first time was trial, error, and reflection. I was honest with the interns and asked for feedback at every stage. From that first iteration, I was able to supply a road map for future interns.

One challenge that is present with every iteration is figuring out how to differentiate training depending on each intern. While there is a consistent training program, it is important to understand how each intern learns best and how they prefer to be supported. This starts with the interview process where each intern is required to present a mini-instruction session on evaluating sources in Google in front of library staff. This gives the search committee an opportunity to see how candidates would approach an information literacy session and what potential training they might need. Once onboarded, the process continues with getting to know each intern and their learning preferences and accommodating them.

Finally, it is a core goal to integrate each intern into the community of academic librarianship, both at Loyola and beyond. While the interns are providing a vital service to the Loyola community, they are also filling their CVs with experiences and skills they can refer to in their job search.

Intern Insights

Each current intern briefly explained their experience in instructing at Loyola, focusing on what helped them gain more confidence and work through what they personally found most challenging about teaching.

Kirk Bowman: I never felt confident with teaching and was nervous about my first experiences with instruction at Loyola. One thing that helped me feel more prepared

was to rehearse, repeatedly. By growing more accustomed to my lesson plan and getting to a point where I knew it very well, I was able to comfortably adapt to the various unpredictable twists and turns that specific lessons always ended up taking.

Eleanor Colbert: The most helpful aspect of the training process for me was shadowing other librarians' sessions. I was able to shadow the same librarian teaching the same content in multiple different classes. I saw firsthand how they responded to different classroom cultures, levels of student participation, and how they adapted the content to fit each class. Before teaching, I was nervous about my ability to respond organically to students and adapt to the classroom culture, which is mostly set before we conduct these sessions. Having the opportunity to shadow other librarians and debrief with them after was extremely valuable in implementing their strategies into my own teaching style and increasing my own confidence in my ability to adapt.

Sarah Rebecca Gaglio: I had the benefit of participating in this internship training program at the same time as I was enrolled in a course on instructional design as part of my LIS program, allowing me to put theory into practice right away. One thing that I was nervous about was my ability to cover such a large amount of content at a pace that wouldn't be overwhelming for the students. I knew I tended to over-compensate by talking fast and forgetting to pause for questions. Therefore, I had an experienced librarian observe my first-time teaching and provide feedback. I received constructive critique and feedback on areas for growth and positive reinforcement of my strengths. This conversation led to longer discussions about improving my time management and pacing in the classroom, such as writing in moments for breathing or using strategically placed questions to break up my lesson plan. I incorporated these strategies into my teaching and continued to reflect on how to prevent information overload, which I am sure will have a lasting impact on my instruction.

Conclusion

One of the biggest takeaways from the development, management, and facilitation of the instruction training program is to provide space and support for the interns to develop their authentic teaching voice and style. We encourage trying different teaching techniques, experimenting with specific language to explain concepts that they may have seen another instructor use, and exploring strategies for engagement, flexibility, and responsiveness in the classroom. These experiences are not only beneficial to interns and LUC but to the library profession as a whole, as they ensure new librarians have real-world experience. Most importantly, the instruction training program promotes genuine collaboration and opportunities for support, framing teaching itself as a learning process and providing interns with a strong base for growth in library instruction. ❧

Notes

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2. Meagan Lacy and Andrea J. Copeland, “The Role of Mentorship Programs in LIS Education and in Professional Development,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 54, no. 2 (2013): 135—46.
3. Meagan Lacy and Andrea J. Copeland, “The Role of Mentorship Programs in LIS Education and in Professional Development,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 54, no. 2 (2013): 135—46.
4. Jennifer E. Nutefall, “Structuring a Successful Instruction Internship,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 19, no. 1 (March 9, 2012): 80—94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2012.652550>.
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6. Mary Todd Chesnut, “Night Vision Goggles or Rose Colored Glasses: A Unique Perspective on Training the Library Graduate Assistant in Instruction,” *The Southeastern Librarian* 57, no. 1 (2009).
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