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CHAPTER 5

Curriculum Issues in Information Literacy Instruction

Barbara Fister and Thomas Eland

Through our profession's movements from bibliographic instruction to library instruction to information literacy instruction and all points along the way, one topic has continued to raise discussion and debate. Regardless of what technology is used, or which learning styles are addressed, or even what we call what we do, the question of where we deliver information literacy instruction remains. The question of what's most effective—teaching some number of sessions integrated into subject courses or teaching information literacy as a separate concept—is one that never seems to be fully resolved. When this topic comes up on ILI-L (the online discussion list focused on information literacy instruction), two voices often emerge with the clearest, most passionate arguments for these two curricular approaches. This chapter provides insights from those two voices, Barbara Fister and Tom Eland.

Course-Related Instruction

Barbara Fister

The debate about how best to teach information literacy is as old as the argument that it should be taught. To date, the most common framework academic libraries use for providing information literacy instruction in higher education is for librarians to collaborate with faculty in the disciplines by providing course-related instructional sessions and materials, usually meeting with the class in the library for a single period to acquaint students with the library resources and search strategies most helpful for a particular research assignment.[1]

The vernacular shorthand for this approach—the "one-shot"—points to its structural limits. If librarians only have a fifty-minute window of opportunity to reach students, and if those sessions are dependent on individual faculty inviting librarians to be involved without any overall vision of how it fits into the curriculum, it is difficult to build a systematic program for developing sophisticated information literacy skills. Librarians become an adjunct to the course instructor, a guest who rarely sees how the skills they are trying to teach are applied by the students they are trying to teach. Too often, librarians given such a short amount of time end up focusing on research tools and "how the library works" rather than on the more challenging processes of refining a research question, evaluating the

results of a search, and understanding the context and content of sources. But the "one-shot," with all its limitations, embraces a fundamental assumption of course-related instruction: that faculty in the disciplines are key players in information literacy instruction and that they share with librarians the responsibility of making it a significant part of the curriculum. In fact, it assumes the single "shot" a librarian has with the students is accompanied by a far more thorough exposure to research skills provided by the instructor throughout the course.

There are pragmatic reasons that course-related instruction has been more widely adopted by libraries than credit-bearing courses. Proposing a course means its value must be articulated and accepted, first by the faculty and then by students. How difficult that may be depends on the campus climate and the local political economy for developing and marketing course offerings. If a course is offered as an elective, it may fail to enroll many students; a library may well decide it's a better use of time to meet for a few hours with as many students as possible in a variety of contexts rather than to spend several hours a week with a small number of students. Making an information literacy course a graduation requirement would reach all students, but it requires a great deal of curricular negotiation and significant staffing, puts a bulk of instructional resources into a single-semester experience—and there still is no guarantee students will believe it is worth their time and tuition dollars. In contrast, developing informal relationships with individual faculty members is relatively easy. It does not require campus-wide acceptance and can be built and nurtured incrementally, as time, staffing, and energy permit. And students are more likely to be motivated to learn material if it has the immediate and obvious benefit of helping them complete a particular assignment successfully.

But there are also philosophical arguments to be made that course-related instruction is a sound approach. Proponents believe information is inevitably embedded in a variety of social and epistemological contexts. Though there is much to learn about finding, evaluating, and using information generally, information is always *about* something, and it can be argued that those skills are best learned in the context of course content rather than in the abstract. Further, what "research" looks like differs from discipline to discipline and how one conducts it will vary depending on the specific task. There is no single process for conducting inquiry, nor is information literacy itself generally considered a specialized body of knowledge that exists apart from the disciplines in which it is embedded.[2] Information literacy should address the broader issues of how knowledge is produced, circulated, and acted upon in society, rather than treating information as discrete bits of material to be gathered and manipulated using standardized rules and processes. In short, it can't be taught effectively as a set of distinctive skills without reference to content or context.[3]

The course-related instruction approach assumes that the entire faculty should be involved in teaching principles of information literacy (though faculty in other departments may not call it that). It takes the position that faculty are already invested in this kind of learning, and are willing to draw on librarians' expertise to improve students' ability to find and use information across the curriculum. It views information literacy as a skill so fundamental it can't be taught by a single department and must be threaded throughout the student's career, building skills incrementally through application in a variety of settings.

Historical Roots

Though the phrase "information literacy" is relatively new, the notion that academic libraries should be a laboratory for independent learning has a long history. Justin Winsor made the argument in 1880 that librarians should be teachers, "not with a text book, but with a world of books.[4]" In the 1960s Patricia Knapp explored the concept of the "library-college," in which learning would be project based and library skills would be practiced and developed throughout the students' entire education.[5] Though she argued that library skills were best learned in context, taught by librarians and disciplinary faculty in collaboration, her experiment uncovered the very problem that perplexes librarians today: how to ensure information literacy would be taken seriously enough by faculty in the disciplines that it would be explicitly and permanently embedded throughout the curriculum. In the 1970s, Earlham College, under the directorship of Evan Farber, developed a vibrant and much-imitated program of course-related instruction; indeed, course-related instruction that is provided by librarians in collaboration with faculty is often called "the Earlham model.[6]" It is probably no accident that the model was developed at a liberal arts college. A study of libraries' contributions to student engagement found that students at liberal arts colleges are more likely than those at research institutions to report involvement in library research and for that involvement to correlate with other factors contributing to engagement, such as working closely with faculty and discussing ideas with other students out of class.[7] The residential nature and size of such colleges may be a factor, as may be the focus of their libraries on undergraduate education rather than on supporting advanced research with large and complex collections.

In 1989 Patricia Breivik and Gordon Gee published *Information Literacy: Revolution in the Library,* a book that boldly suggested librarians could lead the way in higher education reform, arguing that libraries offer an interdisciplinary laboratory for the development of skills necessary for the modern age and lifelong learning.[8] This book appeared on the heels of Ernest Boyer's influential *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America,* that urged a number of reforms

for higher education, including making better use of libraries in developing habits of independent inquiry.[9] Certainly, the notion that information literacy is a basic and essential skill that demands the attention of the entire faculty is one of the chief distinctions between earlier efforts at collaboration—one faculty member and one course at a time—and the more complex and demanding set of skills outlined in the 2000 ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.[10]

It's encouraging to note that these standards were endorsed by the American Association for Higher Education, demonstrating recognition beyond libraries and librarians. As the emphasis in accreditation has shifted from teaching to learning, the assessment of libraries' contributions to institutional strength has likewise focused less on inputs and outputs and more on what difference libraries make in student learning, often specifying collaboration between faculty and librarians as an indicator of quality.[11] More recently, information literacy was identified as one of six intellectual and practical skills promoted by liberal learning by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in their *Greater Expectations* report and their 2005 follow-up report on student achievement.[12] Another indicator that information literacy has achieved mainstream acceptance as an educational goal for institutions is the development by the Educational Testing Service of a standardized exam to test information and communication technology literacy that measures not just technological proficiency, but interpretive, communication, and critical thinking skills.[13] Such developments reinforce what proponents of course-related instruction have said all along: that information literacy is a learning outcome shared across campus, not a subject to be taught primarily by librarians.

Approaches to Integration

The structure a particular library will adopt in designing support for a course-integrated information literacy program depends on resources, strategic alliances, and campus priorities. There is no single roadmap for integrated learning that will work at all institutions, but most academic libraries try to balance the need to teach new students lower-level competencies with meeting the needs of more advanced students whose understanding of how information works has deepened through their exposure to academic work within a particular discipline. The following list covers some of the most common frameworks for instruction.

- *The First Year Experience.* Many libraries form alliances with faculty and staff responsible for courses commonly taken by first year students.[14] This may be a required introductory writing or public speaking course, a first term seminar, or learning communities designed to introduce students to the academy. These courses typically include an introduction to scholarly modes of commu-

nication, practicing argument from sources and documentation rules; libraries often use this activity to introduce basic library skills so that students will be able to use the institutions' resources in future. Students at this level are typically focused on practical needs rather than more sophisticated processes of evaluating sources and understanding the social and cultural contexts of information; their assignments are often focused on practicing skills rather than the content of the sources they select, and as a result students often fail to engage with the material.[15] At universities with large enrollments (those that, ironically, have the most complex libraries) a single introductory session may be the only predictable point of contact librarians have with students in the classroom. In some cases, classroom meetings are highly scripted or are replaced by online tutorials.[16] One potential drawback to designing a program that emphasizes reaching every student in their first year is that faculty may mistakenly assume their students have learned in their first semester all they need to know to use the library and other information resources well. In fact, students who may not tackle a significant research project in their sophomore year are likely to have forgotten most of the basic skills they were taught.[17] Further, if faculty decide whether or not to build on basic skills based on students' reports of their own competency, they are likely to be misled.[18]

- *Course-related instruction on demand.* Librarians often develop collaborative relationships with individual faculty across the curriculum, providing instruction for a variety of courses when asked. Sometimes these relationships are built through department liaison programs, with librarians and faculty collaborating on collection development as well as instruction. At other times they are ad hoc connections forged through more informal interactions. These instruction opportunities often offer the advantage of being more closely tied to course content than first year experience courses tend to be. They also typically focus on research tools and strategies that are specific to a discipline and go beyond generic skills. One drawback to this form of instruction is that students are not all at the same level of proficiency, so there tends to be a certain amount of repetition of information, and the only students who benefit are those whose teachers believe in its importance. Because coverage is spotty, some students will complain they have too many library sessions covering the same information, while others may graduate without having any. And carefully nurtured collaborations fall apart when a faculty member moves on.

- *Sequenced instruction embedded in a department's curriculum.* In this scenario, students in a particular program learn research skills in a sequence that builds from course to course, from basic skills in an introductory survey to the integration of an entire repertoire of skills in a senior capstone project. This may seem an obvious solution to the problems raised above, and yet it is far less common than one would expect for a couple of reasons. First, the faculty in a department must agree that some required courses in their major will include research skills in an agreed-upon sequence. The independence many academics cherish in their teaching seems to work against such brokered agreements. Second, the major must *have* a sequence of courses. In the sciences this is common, but in the social sciences and humanities courses aren't always taken in a prescribed order. Further, it is relatively easy for individual faculty to buy into the importance of information literacy as a learning outcome that matters and to build it into their courses. For an entire department to make such a commitment requires a negotiation of values in which information literacy may be placed in competition with other outcomes such as civic engagement, quantitative literacy, global awareness, or new disciplinary content. Finally, librarians who have been involved in such intentional curricular design report it can take years to build up and maintain the level of trust and awareness that it takes for a department to take the leap.[19]

- *Team-teaching.* In some cases librarians meet multiple times with a particular class or even play an equal role with a faculty member in a discipline in designing, teaching, and evaluating student work for a course. Though there are reports that such teaching is effective[20] it is something of an anomaly, perhaps because interest in collaboration is asymmetrical; librarians are deeply invested in collaborating with faculty in the disciplines and believe that their goals for student learning will be enhanced through collaboration; faculty in the disciplines are less aware of librarians' role in teaching and learning and have far less investment in collaboration.[21]

- *Faculty development.* Some librarians have argued that our energies should be placed in preparing the faculty to do a better job of teaching information literacy[22] and many libraries have conducted workshops and other programs to encourage faculty to embed research skills more effectively into their courses.[23] Yet to date, there is no strong movement for faculty development programs to replace the sort of course-related instruction that has been a mainstay in libraries since the 1970s. In part, this may be due to a recognition that libraries have grown more complex than ever with the emergence of electronic resources. It may also be a symptom of librarians' relative lack of social standing that they aren't more often tapped to lead faculty development events. Yet there is some irony in the fact that highly-trained faculty who conduct research routinely aren't considered sufficiently expert to teach information literacy skills to their students—or, if they are not competent to do so, that librarians don't take on improving information literacy among the faculty as a cause as pressing as that of improving students' skills, even though there is some evidence faculty would be receptive.[24]

- *Creating a learning commons.* In the past few years there has been a surge of interest in designing library facilities in ways that encourage learning.[25] This rejuvenation of the cultural capital of libraries recognizes that, in spite of remote access to electronic materials and the ubiquitous web of information available on the Internet, there is a social dimension to learning that values the symbolic common space occupied by the library. Librarians should explore the opportunities for learning through informal social interaction in the library—and through online social networks. They would do well to reexamine ways that both traditional library services such as reference and new technological tools can become more effective sites for integrating information literacy into student learning.[26]

Conclusion

Though course-related instruction has been a primary means for libraries to promote information literacy, the challenges noted early on by Patricia Knapp remain persistently vexing. Tom Eadie caused a stir in 1990 when he asserted flatly that "user instruction for students does not work." More recently, an essay by Stanley Wilder in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* argued that the information literacy movement is actually "harmful."[27] Both critics described librarians' attempts to integrate research skills into the curriculum as programs that focused on training students in the fine points of search tools without questioning whether students actually needed or wanted those skills. Both suggested that librarians would spend their time more fruitfully reducing barriers to finding information than in teaching students how to overcome those barriers. Though many librarians faulted their characterizations of library instruction as inaccurate, we do not have strong and consistent evidence that course-related instruction has a positive effect on student learning, even though it has been a fixture of academic libraries for over thirty years.

However, there is some recent evidence that information literacy may be gaining wider acceptance outside the field of librarianship. As the focus of accreditation turns from teaching to learning and from inputs to outcomes, and as organizations such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities articulate information literacy as a fundamental outcome of a liberal education—in short, as information literacy becomes a cause for higher education generally rather than a library-driven movement—librarians may find the urge to collaborate less one-sided than it has been since the 1970s, with faculty growing more willing to share leadership with librarians for making information literacy a common goal for higher education.

Notes

1. Surveys of library instruction methods conducted between 1973 and 1997 indicate that while the number of academic libraries with instruction programs grew, the percentage offering credit-bearing courses dropped, according to Edward K. Owusu-Ansah in "Information Literacy and Higher Education: Placing the Academic Library in the Center of a Comprehensive Solution," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30.1 (January 2004): 3-16; Owusu-Ansah argues in favor of reversing that trend by replacing introductory course-related instruction with a required credit-bearing course. A Canadian survey found less than 9% of Canadian academic libraries offered credit courses; see Heidi Julien, "Information literacy instruction in Canadian academic libraries: Longitudinal trends and international comparisons," *College and Research Libraries* 61.6 (November 2000): 510-523.

2. Sheila Webber and Bill Johnston have gone against the grain by arguing that information literacy does, indeed, constitute a distinct discipline with its own theory and practice in "Conceptions of Information Literacy: New Perspectives and Implications," *Journal of Information Science* 26.6 (2000): 381-397.

3. For a critique of information literacy as a concept that reifies and commodifies information and neglects its context and content, see Christine Pawley, "Information Literacy: A Contradictory Coupling," *Library Quarterly* 73.4 (2003): 422-452; for an argument that it should focus on learning rather than information, and on sociotechnical fluency rather than literacy, see James Marcum, "Rethinking Information Literacy," *Library Quarterly* 72.1 (January 2002): 1-26. Both authors argue for a broader yet more focused understanding of the phrase.

4. Justin Winsor, *College Libraries as Aids to Instruction,* quoted in Evan Farber, "College Libraries and the Teaching/Learning Process: A 25-Year Reflection," *Journal of College and Research Libraries* 25.3 (May 1999): 171. Farber also traces the argument about whether librarians or faculty in the disciplines are better prepared to teach the use of the library back to the 1930s. Harvie Branscomb contended that faculty should bring their classes to the library, while Louis Shores proposed the "Library College" in which librarian-bibliographers would teach academic subjects. See Farber's "Faculty-Librarian Cooperation: A Personal Retrospective," *Reference Services Review* 27.3 (1999): 229-234.

5. *Patricia Knapp, The Monteith College Library Experiment (New York: Scarecrow, 1966); for an assessment of Knapp's work, see Diane Worrell, "The Work of Patricia Knapp (1914-1972): Relevance for the Electronic Era," The Katharine Sharp Review* 3 (Summer 1996). Available online from http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/review.old/summer1996/worrell.html [22 April 2006.]

6. Larry Hardesty, Jamie Hastreiter, and David Henderson, eds., *Bibliographic Instruction in Practice: A Tribute to Evan Ira Farber* (Ann Arbor: Pierian, 1993).

7. George D. Kuh and Robert M. Gonyea, "The Role of the Academic Library in Promoting Student Engagement in Learning," *College and Research Libraries* 64 (July 2003): 256-281.

8. Patricia Senn Breivik and E. Gordon Gee, *Information Literacy: Revolution in the Library* (New York: American Council on Education, 1989).

9. Ernest L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

10. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,* 2000. Available online from http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm [22 April 2006].

11. Larry Hardesty, "Academic Libraries and Regional Accreditation," *Library Issues: Briefings for Faculty and Administrators* 21.4 (March 2001); see also the Association of College and Research Libraries' recently revised *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2004) <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standardslibraries.htm> (22 April 2006).

12. American Association of Colleges and Universities, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College,* 2002, <http://www.greaterexpectations.org> (22 April 2006); for a focus on progress and assessment measures, see *Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Student Achievement in College,* 2005, <http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/pdfs/

LEAP_Report_FINAL.pdf> (22 April 2006).

13. Background on the test and its development can be found under the link to ICT Literacy Assessment through the Educational Testing Service portal, <http://www.ets.org> (22 April 2006).

14. Collen Boff and Kristin Johnson report that most FYE courses taught in the U.S. include a library component, but what that means varies widely; see "The Library and First-Year Experience Courses: A Nationwide Study," *Reference Services Review* 30.4 (2002): 277-287.

15. Richard Larson offered a classic critique of this problem in "The 'Research Paper' in the Writing Course: A Non-Form of Writing," *College English* 44.8 (December 1982): 811-816.

16. Jerilyn Veldorf describes a process for developing reproducible session plans in *Creating the One-Shot Library Workshop: A Step-By-Step Guide* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2006); William A. Orme describes the use of an online tutorial in "A Study of the Residual Impact of the Texas *Information Literacy* Tutorial on the *Information*-Seeking Ability of *First Year* College Students," *College & Research Libraries* 65.3 (May 2004): 205-215.

17. This observation is based on anecdotal evidence; however a survey conducted in 2000 found that students were not retaining what they learned and, in fact, there was no correlation between amount of instruction and skill level. See Honora F. Nerz and Suzanne T. Weiner, "Information Competencies: A Strategic Approach," in *Proceedings of the 2001 American Society for Engineering Annual Conference & Exposition*, <http://eld.lib.ucdavis.edu/fulltext/00510_2001.pdf> (10 June 10, 2006).

18. A UC Berkeley study found that students' evaluation of their basic information literacy skills were out of kilter with their actual abilities; see Patricia Davitt Maughan, "Assessing Information Literacy Among Undergraduates: A Discussion of the Literature and the University of California-Berkeley Assessment Experience," *College and Research Libraries* 62.1 (January 2001): 71-85; see also Diana G. Oblinger and Brian L. Hawkins, "The Myth about Student Competency," *Educause Review* 41.2 (March-April 2006):12-13.

19. For a thorough discussion of the issues see Beth Christensen, "Warp, Weft, and Waffle: Weaving Information Literacy into an Undergraduate Music Curriculum," *Notes* 60.3 (March 2004): 616-631.

20. Molly Flashpoler reports first year seminar sections that had an enhanced information literacy component with multiple sessions had stronger information literacy test results than sections with a single library session in "Information Literacy Program Assessment: One Small College Takes the Big Plunge," *Reference Services Review* 31.2 (2003): 129-40. Michael R. Hearn also describes a multiple-session experience in "Embedding a Librarian in the Classroom: An Intensive Information Literacy Model." *Reference Services Review* 33.2 (2005): 219-227.

21. Lars Christensen, Mindy Stombler, and Lyn Thaxton, "A Report on Librarian-Faculty Relations from a Sociological Perspective," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30.2 (March 2004): 116-121.

22. Risë L. Smith argues that librarians could have an impact on more students through faculty programming in "Philosophical Shift: Teach the Faculty to Teach Information Literacy," in *Choosing Our Futures: Proceedings of the 8th National Conference* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 1997) <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlevents/nationalconference/97authorindex.htm>; Patricia Iannuzzi provides an overview in "Faculty Development and Information Literacy: Establishing Campus Partnerships," *Reference Services Review* 26 (1998): 97-102.

23. "Enhancing Developmental Research Skills in the Undergraduate Curriculum" is an example of a faculty development program funded by a two-year Institute of Museum and Library Services National Leadership Grant in 1999; more information, including details of the workshop and the grant proposal can be found at <http://www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/academics/library/IMLS/> (22 April 2006).

24. Gloria Leckie and Anne Fullerton, "Information Literacy in Science and Engineering Education: Faculty Attitudes and Pedagogical Practices," *College and Research Libraries* 60.1 (January 1999): 9-29.

25. Scott Bennett provides a compelling argument for designing libraries around student learning needs rather than library services in *Libraries Designed for Learning* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2003); see also *Library as Place: Rethinking Roles, Rethinking Space* (Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2005).

26. For an examination of the potential of the reference desk, see James K. Elmborg, "Teaching at the Desk: Toward a Reference Pedagogy," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2.3 (July 2003): 455-464; for a broad perspective, see Jean Galvin, "Alternative Strategies for Promoting Information Literacy." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 31.4 (July 2004): 352-357.

27. Tom Eadie, "Immodest Proposals: User Instruction for Students Does Not Work," *Library Journal* 115 (15 October 1990): 42-45; Stanley Wilder, "Information Literacy Makes All the Wrong Assumptions." *Chronicle of Higher Education* January 7, 2005: B13.

A Curriculum-Integrated Approach to Information Literacy

Thomas W. Eland

Much has been written about course integrated information literacy. The goal of course integrated information literacy is to make information literacy instruction relevant to students by contextualizing instruction within disciplined-based courses that require some sort of research project. Proponents of course integrated information literacy instruction generally argue that it produces a collaborative approach to teaching the research process. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards and best practices material demonstrates a bias towards this model of instruction, urging librarians to develop a cooperative model with teaching faculty for the delivery of information literacy instruction. Much of the information literacy literature implies that "teaching faculty" are to take the lead in instructional delivery, with librarians acting in a consultative role.

While there is much that is commendable about this model—collaboration is often a desirable educational goal, and in an ideal educational environment would be the norm, ensuring that the expertise of everyone is utilized—there are practical reasons why the model has not and ultimately will not work in higher education. Students and librarians would be better served by the development of a curriculum integrated model.

What is the Desired Outcome of an Information Literacy Program?

The first question that we must ask as a profession is: "How many students do we wish to reach with information literacy instruction?" Is the goal of information literacy instruction to teach and assess every student who graduates from