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Reimagining the research assignment

Faculty-librarian collaborations that increase student learning

One important focus of the libraries' work in recent years has been transforming the work of subject librarians to foster the development of "strong, collaborative, opportunistic relationships that place Ohio University (OU) Libraries in the flow of teaching, learning, and research."[1] Librarians seek to be experts embedded in the disciplines, collaborating and partnering with faculty as part of the academic enterprise.

The OU Libraries have had a significant history of faculty outreach programming, such as the rollout and updates of Blackboard and the introduction of new subscription databases, done in partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Academic Technology Department, and other divisions. A direct precursor to Reimagining the Research Assignment project discussed in this article was the Faculty-Librarian Information Competency grant, which awarded $1,000 for faculty members to work with their subject liaison to revamp a course syllabus with the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education as an element.

Among the challenges OU Libraries face is the absence of explicit information literacy standards in the university's general education curriculum.[2] Therefore, librarian effort to grow the quality of information use in student work depends on perceptions by individual faculty that their students should be doing better. Reaching out proactively to faculty opens doors but has not resulted in program-level planning. Information literacy at OU is impeded by its dependence on individually built professional relationships rather than a university-wide impetus.

The Reimagining the Research Assignment project emerged from the libraries' Community of Practice (COP) on Information Literacy and Faculty, led by Sherri Saines. The idea to focus on faculty, rather than engaging directly with students, emerged strongly from research from Project Information Literacy (PIL), which found that 84% of students go to faculty first with research questions.[3]

At the first meeting, COP members brainstormed about ways to engage faculty. COP members, working with Kelly Broughton, assistant dean for research and education services, first shared information on information literacy with OU's faculty senate, with the goal of informing ongoing discussions about a potential revision of the general education curriculum. This information referenced the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for

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Higher Education, which was then in development, and listed ways librarians collaborate with faculty to increase student learning.

COP failed to gain significant traction with this approach and decided to review its initial brainstorming list. Members pondered disseminating a short list of the most helpful readings and videos that might engage faculty.

Around this same time, the ACRL Framework was formally approved, and members sought to bring that document to faculty, as well. COP members discussed how to create a place or event for faculty to discuss, be creative, think through, and get brave with the content of the material. COP members also wanted to be in the room when faculty had those discussions, guiding debate about implications and learning what faculty needed to advance their efforts.

COP members decided to pursue a university-wide grant to fund a faculty workshop series on information literacy.[4] COP met with the university college dean responsible for the grant, and this meeting was critical, as it helped reframe the grant application to focus on student success, while working through a faculty audience.

The major component of the grant was $7,500 to provide a stipend for a cohort of 15 faculty members to attend the workshop series and engage in follow-up communications with their subject librarian. The libraries' in-kind contributions were staff time, meeting spaces, equipment, and refreshments at the two planned workshops. The program emphasized building partnerships between librarians and teaching faculty. So many applicants applied that COP went back to the dean to ask for additional funding so that a larger group could be accepted to the program. As a result, 15 faculty participants were welcomed in the fall 2016 semester and there were six faculty participants in the spring 2016 semester.

The second cycle of the program began in fall 2016. Six faculty completed the spring 2017 workshops. Another cohort took place spring 2018.

Moving forward collaborations

In planning the workshop sessions, COP members sought to experiment, within a basic framework, with different iterations of content during each session, in order to make the workshops maximally engaging and effective. The complexity of offering the program (including tracking the applications and stipends) and the experimentation with workshop content meant that thus far we have not been able to effectively standardize nor institutionalize this program.

As we discuss later in the article, the workshop sessions were exceedingly well-received. Yet it is worth noting that the administrative workload associated with providing stipends was time consuming, and it remains unclear if stipends improve outcomes or positively affect attendance. COP members also asked themselves a conceptual question: Do we want to pay faculty to collaborate with us, or does the move toward partnership necessitate that the reward be intrinsic for both parties and motivated by the work itself?

Over the course of the two academic years of the Reimagining the Research Assignment workshops, the format and content of the sessions evolved. For the first offering in fall 2015, faculty were paid a total of $500 if they:

1. attended a two-hour workshop that covered student research realities, information literacy concepts, and librarians' roles;

2. attended a second three-hour workshop that covered assessment rubrics and creative assignments, and allowed time to work with their subject librarian to revise assignments or create assessments;

3. deployed the revised assignment in the next semester the class was offered; and

4. provided a reflection of their experiences via a video interview.

The in-person workshop sessions consisted of librarians introducing content via PowerPoint or handout presentation, followed by either a discussion or active learning exercise among all participants, or smaller group work with subject librarians and their faculty partners. Each table held several faculty and

librarians from different disciplines, allowing for crosspollination of ideas.[5]

Because of the strong interest in the workshops, we had to ask some faculty to defer their participation until spring 2016. Spring semester had several scheduling challenges for the nine faculty participants, so we condensed the two in-person workshops into one session, and required the faculty members to hold an additional two-hour meeting with their subject librarians at their convenience. While we originally required a video reflection of all faculty participants, we did not record video testimonials for this cohort due to the difficulty in scheduling them.

As an example, one faculty member working with a librarian launched a Wikipedia assignment. Students were required to learn basic Wikipedia editing, choose an article that was tagged as a stub, and expand its reach with academic sources. The subject librarian and the faculty member also learned wiki editing and chose and enlarged a post alongside the students. Writing for the "real world" proved a potent motivator, and the combination of faculty subject expertise and librarian search expertise fully supported the students' efforts.

An iterative process

A third iteration of the workshop was offered in spring 2017. Because our original grant money had been used for the previous workshops, we decided that we would not pay the faculty participants. Record keeping for participation and stipends had become burdensome, so we appreciated the discontinuation of financial bookkeeping. However, as was the case with the other workshops, the libraries provided food and coffee. The spring 2017 series consisted of a two-hour introductory session. The faculty and librarians were asked to schedule additional work on their own time and to deploy the revised assignment during fall 2017 semester.

To ensure we considered the no-pay decision completely, we held a roundtable discussion at the Academic Library Association of Ohio meeting to discuss appropriate faculty incentives. The consensus was to concentrate on whatever advanced promotion and tenure for faculty and librarians. To that end, in the third round, we emphasized collaborative assessment and writing for journal publication.

In spring 2018, the fourth cohort was split into two rounds of two, 80-minute workshops, plus the follow-up work of faculty-librarian collaboration. We scheduled these according to the class schedule blocks, which simplified everyone's availability. The content of the workshops was updated with some of the latest PIL results, and presentations were compressed to allow more discussion time.

Seeking evidence

Using the preworkshop faculty applications from the first cohort, we were able to identify two of the most common pitfalls, identified by faculty, which students faced when conducting research. The first area of concern identified was finding and using reliable sources. Most of the faculty who participated in the workshops were dismayed about students using simple Google searches instead of library databases. They further responded that students were mostly unaware of the resources available in the library and the role of the subject librarian as research consultant.

The second area of concern was synthesizing and applying the information to their assignment. Faculty saw that students had a difficult time integrating multiple sources and exploring different perspectives. Faculty also believed that students performance was reflective of a lack of enthusiasm regarding the class assignment.

After implementing the changes to their research assignment, all faculty reported (via video interview) an improvement in student performance with the modified research assignment. They indicated that issues with the first area of concern had been significantly addressed, specifically mentioning that students used library databases, librarians, and archives more and relied less on Google and Wikipedia. Additionally, students were more engaged in evaluating resources, which resulted in a greater variety of reliable sources used in their research.

Similarly, faculty recorded substantial improvement with the second area of concern, noting improvement in the quality of student work regarding integration of sources, analysis of information, and development of content. Additionally, faculty felt that students had stronger engagement and interest in the assignment and were less intimidated with the research process and using library resources.

"I was able to see a substantial change in the quality of their work," one faculty member reflected. Another said, "This grant really helped me break down the pieces, creating little steps that build on each other to make it manageable and understandable to the students."[6]

Analysis of pre- and post-statements from written applications and oral interviews showed that working closely with the subject librarian allowed faculty to refine their research assignments in ways that addressed commonly faced issues, resulting in overall improved student performance.

In subsequent years, written workshop evaluations have been one element that guided planning. For example, faculty tell us they either do or do not already value rubrics, and our brief overview fits neither need. Consequently, we may use video in a flipped classroom approach for that information in the future. The same is true of the section on learning objectives. We hope to be more responsive to faculty's perceived needs as we further develop these workshops.

By emphasizing coauthored publication rather than effortful feedback to us, several librarian/faculty pairs have gone on to create and share scholarly work from their collaborations.[7, 8, 9]

Moving forward

COP is currently considering changes that would make the project more convenient for faculty and offer meaningful rewards for both faculty and librarians. More support for collaborative publication is one such idea.

Another emphasis of OU Libraries in 2016–17 was an extended series of workshops on open textbooks. OU recently joined the Open Textbook Network, so we will be offering the required workshops for that partnership.[10] Part of our thinking is to meld these emphases into one program of workshops with varied endpoints. Faculty from previous groups have been positive about this program, and that has created some call for continued workshops and collaborations. The libraries seek to be both responsive and proactive in continuing to position librarians as partners in teaching, learning, and research.

Notes

1. Kelly Broughton, "Developing a Matrix and Using Self-Reported Scoring to Measure Librarian Engagement on Campus," *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 17 no. 2 (2016): 142.

2. "Ohio University General Education Requirements," *Ohio University Undergraduate Catalog 2017-2018,* Ohio University, accessed December 21, 2017, www.catalogs.ohio.edu/content.php?catoid=53&navoid=3997.

3. Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, "Lessons Learned: How College Students Seek Information in the Digital Age," "Project Information Literacy Progress Report," December 1, 2009 [v2]: 17, www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2009_finalv_yr1_12_2009v2.pdf.

4. "The [1804] Fund was established by the Ohio University Foundation to support the University's core mission of maintaining, strengthening, and enhancing a learning-centered community. The Fund promotes collaboration among units. The Fund focuses its support through two fund categories: Undergraduate Learning and Faculty Research and Graduate Studies." "Funding Resources," Ohio University, accessed December 21, 2017, https://www.ohio.edu/research/Funding.cfm.

5. "Reimagining the Research Assignment: Lesson Plan, Slides, Handouts," Ohio University Libraries, accessed December 19,

tively without an account being tied to one employee's email (such as with Dropbox and Google Drive). Working together again, the KM librarian and the cataloging and metadata librarian were able to create a "sandbox" in SharePoint that allowed groups that requested a collaborative space to work. This new area is called the TCC Collaborative Workspace. Training documents have been developed, and, to this point, four groups have requested collaborative sites. This site will continue to grow, and trainings across the college will be offered in the near future.
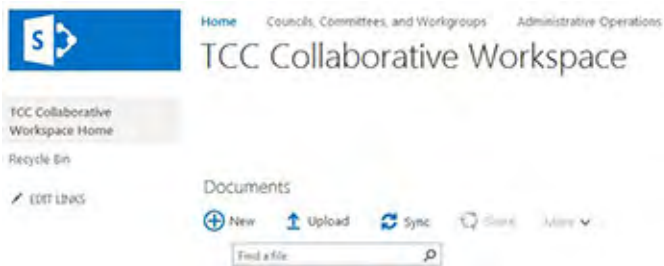
Tulsa Community College Collaborative Workspace.

Lessons learned

Now that different areas of TCC have started using SharePoint, it is time to put the lessons learned to work for us in the TCC library. We have now transitioned from the TCC Library KM Guide to the TCC Library Knowledge

Management SharePoint site. The structure of the original LibGuide translates perfectly into the structure of a SharePoint site, and having this site gives us the opportunity to build the site using all of the lessons we have learned from building SharePoint sites for other parts of the college.

Moving forward, we plan on using our site as a model to show other areas of the college what we can build for them. We have been given positive feedback on the SharePoint sites that we have built up to this point, and we plan on continuing our work in KM to create a true knowledge sharing community at TCC.

Note

1. You can view the TCC Library Knowledge Management LibGuide by visiting https://guides.library.tulsacc.edu/TCCKM. ✏

2017, http://libguides.library.ohiou.edu/imagine.

6. "Reimagining the Research Project: a Faculty—Librarian Collaborative Project at Ohio University," Ohio University, accessed December 19, 2017, https://youtu.be/gJwIlvv8lqY.

7. Paul C. Campbell and Miriam Intrator, "Making First Contact with Primary Sources: How Collaborating with Faculty and Library Special Collections Increases Student Engagement in Teaching IL" (presentation, LOEX 2018, Houston, Texas, May 3-5, 2018).

8. Paul C. Campbell and Miriam Intrator, "Collaboration with Faculty and Library

Special Collections: Increasing Student Engagement with Primary Sources" (poster, Conference of California Academic and Research Libraries, Redwood City, California, April 13–15, 2018).

9. Hanna Schmillen, Jeffery A. Russell, and Sherri Saines, "Reimagining a Research Assignment in Performing Arts Medicine: Librarian-Faculty Collaboration to Increase Information Literacy Skills and Student Success" (poster, Medical Library Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, Washington, May 27–31, 2017).

10. Open Textbook Network, http://research.cehd.umn.edu/otn/about-us/. ✏