Bibliographic Instruction

BI for the Invisible University

Two years ago in Dallas the ALA Library Instruction Round Table heard Dr. K. Patricia Cross say, "... some of our richest learning experiences occur not in organized classes, but in self-directed learning that is pursued solely because the learner wants to know."1 Investigation revealed that, in fact, ninety percent of all adults engage in some type of learning activity in a year and seventy-three percent of those projects are self-guided.2 Although not formally affiliated with an institution of higher learning, these students, Ronald Gross suggests, are part of an "invisible university," the network of learning opportunities and resources available to independent learners.3 Recognizing that libraries are a major component in this network and that these "unaffiliated" students may never have been exposed to any library orientation or instruction, the Gardner-Harvey Library and the Office of Continuing Education at Miami University-Middletown (MUM) initiated a non-credit course titled "Your Other Education: Library Lessons for Lifelong Learning." This course is a new element in an active bibliographic instruction program that includes teaching basic skills to pre-college students and to freshmen, conducting course-related instruction in several disciplines, and producing printed guides to the library and to various subjects. While those activities reflect the campus curriculum, "Your Other Education" does not. This course is geared toward independent learners, who have a multiplicity of motivations for learning, who use many different resources and services to acquire knowledge, and who work at an individually determined pace.

"Your Other Education" was first taught by the campus librarian in the fall of 1980, meeting once a week in two-hour sessions for six weeks. Students earned 1.2 continuing education units (CEUs) for successful completion. Publicity for the course was carried out by the Office of Continuing Education. The course appeared in their fall catalog along with Aerobic Dancing, Math without Fear, Joy of the Arts, and Leadership Theory for Newly Registered Nurses. A detailed brochure on "Your Other Education" was also prepared and mailed to approximately two hundred holders of community borrowing cards from the Gardner-Harvey Library. Multiple copies of the brochure were placed in local public libraries and were sent to businesses and to the Greater Cincinnati Library Consortium for distribution. All registration was handled by the Office of Continuing Education.

Students were asked to purchase two textbooks, The Lifelong Learner by Ronald Gross (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1977) and Finding Facts Fast by Alden Todd (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1979). The books were selected for their readability and their emphasis on the use of libraries for self-directed learning as opposed to the "how-to-use-the-academic-library-to-write-a-term-paper" approach of many guides. Correspondence with both authors proved very fruitful in the planning of the course.

In the first session the course was introduced with a discussion of lifelong learning and the roles of libraries and information-seeking. Students were surveyed by means of a questionnaire that explored occupation, education, hobbies/special interests, library use, and age. It was a diverse population, ranging in age from mid-forties to over sixty. Some students had full time jobs outside the home, some were retired, and some were homemakers. All students had completed high school and experience in college ranged from a few courses to completed master's degrees.

To the question, "At any time during your formal education did you receive instruction in the use of libraries?" the negative response was one hundred percent. Students had participated in the last two years in a variety of educational activities such as auditing university courses, completing non-credit courses, engaging in private lessons, and attending workshops, seminars, and professional conferences. They also had studied independently using commercially planned and self-planned programs. One student had planned a learning program for others. All students held cards from their local public library; twenty percent held cards from Gardner-Harvey Library.

Special interests of the students included reading, art, travel, genealogy, church history, gambling, interior design, computers, and Chinese

culture. These were fully matriculated students of
the invisible university!

They were also given a pre-test to determine
their prior knowledge of library resources. The
test included a matching section on information
and library resources, a true/false section on li-

braries and lifelong learning, and short answer
sections on the card catalog and the Reader's
Guide. The highest score on the pre-test was
eighty-three percent; the lowest, sixty-five.

Session II covered the “lingo” of libraries, in-
cluding history and types, major schemes of or-

ganization, and types and characteristics of refer-
ence materials. The next three sessions were sub-
ject oriented, covering financial information
sources (Making Sense of $$$ and €€€€€), legal and
medical information (Helping your Helpers), and
employment and recreation (At Work and At
Play). In the final session, “Wrap It Up and Take
It Home,” students were presented tips on plan-
ning, organizing, and documenting a learning
project and on creating a home reference library.
On that last night they also took a post-test, each
student revealing improvement of four to fifteen
percentage points.

There were many reasons for planning and ex-
ecuting “Your Other Education: Library Lessons
for Lifelong Learning.” A potential student (who
did take the course) suggested that library utiliza-
tion might make a good topic for a continuing
education course. The librarian, to whom that
suggestion was made, had had sufficient experi-
ence with “fifty-minute stands” that she wanted
and needed the experience of teaching library
skills to a group that met over a period of time.
But it was during her background research into
lifelong learning that the true rationale for such a
course became apparent. The editors of Serving
Lifelong Learners, number twenty nine in the
Jossey-Bass New Directions for Community Col-
leges series, say, “Most learning is simply not
under our (the community colleges’) auspices,”
and that the institutions “need to be less preoc-
cupied with control and much more concerned
with supporting and guiding students in learning
pursuits.”4 On that assumption, teaching library
and bibliographic skills to non-affiliated learners
is an appropriate component of an academic li-

brary’s instruction program and the campus’ con-
tinuing education unit may be the most effective
channel for implementation.—Virginia Ellis
Palmer.

—Heerman, Enders, and Wine, Serving
Lifelong Learners, p. viii.

Editor’s Note: Virginia Palmer is head regional
campus librarian at Miami University-Middle-
town, Ohio.

Fallacies of
Librarianship

A British librarian of many talents and
much experience has devised the following
list of erroneous but commonly-held beliefs
maintained by some library professionals. The
list has recently been published by New Li-

brary World, a London publication.

1. Users can find their own way around a
library.
2. Users are completely helpless at all
stages of library use.
3. Gift books are free.
4. Cooperation between libraries, of what-
ever kind, saves money.
5. Holdings are more important than ser-
vice.
6. The case for well-funded libraries is self-
apparent.
7. A library that receives no complaints is a
good library.
8. Library education is a useful preparation
for library practice.
9. A research library should give the un-
known needs of the future priority over the
known needs of the present.
10. The catalog is the key to the library.
11. Interlibrary borrowing is expensive.
12. Interlibrary borrowing is a cheap substi-
tute for acquisition.
13. Interlibrary borrowing is no substitute
for acquisition.
14. The distance between a lending and a
borrowing library affects the speed of supply.
15. It is possible to devise a classification
scheme that organizes knowledge in a cohe-
rent, useful, and intelligible way that is and
will remain acceptable.
16. Existing classification schemes can be
improved by local modifications.
17. No system devised for one library can
be adopted by any other library.
18. A love of books is a useful prerequisite
for a librarian.
19. All that is needed to improve a library
service is more money and more staff.
20. A library building that wins a prize for
architecture is functional.

If C&RL News readers wish to add further
fallacies to the list, or if something has been
included which perhaps should not have
been, write George M. Eberhart, ACRL/ALA,
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