The Future of Latin American Library Collections and Research

Acosta-Rodríguez, Fernando

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Several years ago, librarians at Temple University won the right to develop and implement a formal Information Literacy (IL) program within the General Education (GenEd) curriculum. A committee of librarians met to build on outcomes and learning activities that had already been developed for the first-year GenEd writing course titled English 0802: Analytical Reading and Writing. Today at Temple, instructors of this course can neither opt out of the two mandatory library sessions nor change the predetermined IL outcomes. Most instructors are happy to work with librarians to meet shared IL outcomes.

Significant among the several benefits of this arrangement, certainly from the librarians’ perspective, is the fact that IL outcomes are now integrated into the curriculum to an extent once thought unimaginable only ten years ago. Many English 0802 instructors are reporting (anecdotally) improvements in their students’ research skills. In one important way, however, Temple librarians have become victims of their own success: it is difficult for the dozen full-time members of the Reference and Instructional Services Department to teach an average of 130 sections (or 260 distinct class periods) of English 0802 offered every fall and spring semester. Additionally, the following challenges remain to be addressed:

- Some librarians feel that the “old one-shot” has morphed into the “new two-shot.” Several would like to have even more formal, structured interactions with students.

- It is not yet feasible to track student learning. Instead student “satisfaction” is elicited in a two-minute, postworkshop evaluation. Students are asked whether or not the librarian presented the information “clearly and effectively,” and if the information presented was relevant to the research assignment. Students are also asked what they found most and least useful about the two workshops.

- Ultimately, the librarians continue to be reliant upon individual faculty buy-in, although to a lesser extent than before. A few faculty members simply “teach around” the library sessions.
Some of these challenges can be mitigated by moving to a greater level of classroom integration or by “embedding librarians into the classroom.” In practice, academic librarians do not generally take the concept of information literacy as seriously as a reader of the information science literature might expect. If information literacy is so central to our mission as reference and instruction librarians, why—despite the well-known deficiencies of our current one-shots—do we not take greater responsibility for ensuring that our students develop IL skills? Why are measures for tracking student learning often missing from our IL instruction? Why, ultimately, have we not demanded greater responsibility for teaching in a domain within which librarians are particularly well suited? The latter question is often answered with the following:

- Information literacy is not a discipline but rather a set of skills or learning outcomes that apply across all disciplines. One cannot teach IL like history, literature, or biology. Indeed, for IL instruction to be effective, it must be grounded in the disciplines.

- I am a librarian, not a member of the teaching faculty. It is not my job and/or I do not feel qualified to teach college-level courses. Besides, my position entails too many other responsibilities.

- The faculty will do the job if we provide them guidance.

The literature does not agree on a definition for librarian embedment, but essentially an embedded librarian is one who spends time with students and faculty outside the library, for example, office hours and especially time in the classroom. The literature suggests that students will learn to find, evaluate, and use information more effectively when librarians become active and integral course participants, for example, developing and grading assignments.

Keeping the latter in mind, and hoping to counter any arguments against even greater librarian embedment, Ron Webb, Temple University’s director of Latin American Studies, and I worked throughout fiscal year 2009–2010 to jointly develop a writing-intensive IL course for Latin American Studies titled LAS 2098: The Legacy of Mesoamerica. The appropriate Temple University committees, that is, the Committee on Instruction and the Writing-Intensive Course Committee, approved our course in May 2010. As of this writing, it is expected to run in fall 2011 or spring 2012. The vice provost and director of the Temple University Writing Center wrote of our course proposal: “The [Writing-Intensive Course] committee members appreciated the depth of the ‘information literacy’ component of this course. We have never seen a w-course proposal that presented such a thorough and interesting approach to teaching students about finding and using sources.” An associate professor of Spanish stated: “We [the Committee on Instruction] were all impressed with the integration of the library component in this course. You have set a very
innovative precedent for such collaboration and we expect that others in the college will follow suit.”

The librarian’s role in LAS 2098 will be to develop and deliver up to five class lectures, that is, disciplinary course content, that will include a special emphasis on IL outcomes; to develop and grade the annotated bibliography portion of the research paper (25 percent of grade), IL activity (10 percent of grade), and IL assignment (10 percent of grade); and to provide substantial out-of-class support in the form of a research guide and office hours. The research guide including IL assignments are available online at http://guides.temple.edu/las2098.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


