

Library research narrative

In Fall 2014, an embedded librarian program was launched. The program was to be as follows:

Mission Statement

We will assist instructors by providing semester-long instructional support for students related to research and information analysis through lecture modules, course content, and assignment assistance. We aim to create an integrated and sustained collaboration with teaching faculty instead of a parallel interaction through traditional library instruction.

Rationale

Information seeking behavior has changed with the advancement of digital information. Students are no longer restricted to using physical items located within a library building to get the information they need. In addition, distance students may not have the ability to physically access materials or have face-to-face interaction with library staff during instruction sessions. For librarians, these changes mean moving beyond the traditional one-hour library orientation and finding new ways to convey information about library resources, teach searching techniques, and teach critical information analysis. By being part of a course and privy to classroom lecture materials and student discussions, librarians can help direct research and information seeking behaviors to give students the tools they need to do good research and to produce good projects and papers.

What does an embedded librarian do?

An embedded librarian collaborates with teaching faculty and becomes part of a course as a resource for both the faculty member and the students. The embedded librarian facilitates student research and use of library resources throughout the course. The embedded librarian will:

- Provide specially designed content for the course, including suggested resources, tutorials, search strategies, and research guides
- Give in-class presentations about information resources and how to use them effectively and analyze the information found
- Help develop library and information-related assignments
- Serve as a contact person for library and research questions
- Offer individual attention to students during any stage of their research process
- Work with students to resolve access issues

Assessment

Pre- and post-testing will be used to analyze the effectiveness of students' understanding of library tools and assessment of chosen research materials for any given project. Other data collection methods such as surveys or reflective narratives may be used to gather information for program enhancement.

Up until Spring 2017, the library had two reference and instructional librarians on staff. Due to a budget reduction during that time period, the position was not filled leaving one instruction librarian on staff. This has meant a shift in operations from an embedded methodology to a more session-based approach where assignment based specialized tutorials are created with a hands-on lecture followed by work-day in the computer lab scenarios.

The classes that have been most impacted by having an embedded librarian are BIOL 124 – Environmental Science and MUS 100 – Music Appreciation. In these two classes the instructional librarian actually provides grade input and is able to analyze if the research instruction is making an impact.

Specifically in the BIOL 124 class, pre-and post-tests are administered. The data gathered does show progress in understanding the database resources, how to use scholarly communication and information assessment for sources gathered on the Internet. There is one direct assignment where critical thinking is the focus. Students are given an internet video and then four sources including a scholarly article and three commentaries. The assignment requires the students to determine which of the sources are credible.

The research module contains lectures for these areas:

- Tour of the library's website
- What is scholarly communication?
- What is a database?
- How to read a scholarly article
- How to use the database search tools
- What is an abstract?
- Why it is important to cite sources and the tools available
- How to obtain full-text copies of articles
- How to search the library's book catalog
- How to assess internet information – currency, reliability, authority and purpose
- How search engines determine results

Each lesson has clearly-defined learning objectives.

Here is one example:

Citations

Students will be able to explain the reason for using citations.

Students will be able to identify citation help tools from different databases.

Students will be able to list common citation mistakes when using citation help tools.

Professors are also able to book bibliographic instruction sessions in the library. The instructional librarian determines the best databases to demonstrate based on the subject topic. At other times over the past years, English classes have come to the library to get a very generic introduction to the library's resources.

Specialized course materials have been developed in these subject areas:

- Agriculture – module was developed to assist students with forming a research question followed by research instruction and a second work-day in the library
- Art – Master artist profile project
- Energy – Introductory energy classes attend a hands-on computer lab where resources are demonstrated
- English – varies by topic but have included argument/commentary (an assessment rubric was done on this by Michael Tomanek), poetry, dual credit students
- History – two different project specific instruction sessions on specific databases related to subject
- Humanities – research specific lecture on appropriate sources for specific assignment on cultural customs
- Speech/Communications – general classes with hands-on computer lab instruction followed by return visits for work days
- Nursing – specific training on research databases
- PSYC 252 – in-depth research project beginning with exploration of topics to finite searching for information
- Psychology – handouts created to introduce students to two specific databases and how to access the specific source listed by the instructor
- Sociology – handouts created to introduce students to two specific databases and how to access the specific source listed by the instructor

There have been conversations concerning the creation of a library module available in the learning management system. It would contain tutorials explaining research methods and actions. The tutorials would follow the Information Literacy IELO goals with quizzes included to provide assessment data. (Other modules could be produced for any of the IELOs). Using this method would enhance library instruction because the time spent in an instruction session would not have to cover the basics. It also would provide all students with the instruction and not rely on one of their instructors taking class time to cover the material.