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Sharing the Reins: New Angles on Instruction

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Submitted by Co-moderators:

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Session notes:

Can Only Librarians Do Library Instruction? Collaborating with Art History Graduate Students to Teach Information Literacy

Katie Morrison, Arts Education and Regional Services Director, Tippecanoe Arts Federation
Alexander Watkins, Art & Architecture Librarian, University Library, University of Colorado Boulder

Can only librarians teach library instruction? Watkins and Morrison say, “no.” At the University of Colorado Boulder, Watkins used the train-the-trainer model to teach graduate art history students/ teaching assistants to lead library instruction sessions for undergraduates. Watkins’s goal was to reach the many large introductory courses offered each semester. He also sought to scaffold instruction to upper division students. Goals for the graduate teaching assistants included learning how to use appropriate sources, expanding teaching skills, and integrating information literacy into art history teaching. Morrison, who at the time was a graduate student that participated in this program, explained that the teaching assistants were happy to receive help with lesson plans and activities, since they received little guidance related to teaching otherwise.

The structure of the program spanned two semesters. The first semester covered: meet the art librarians, use of keywords, and using the catalog to find books in the stacks. Watkins stated that students required more help than he realized. Just learning how to find books was an empowering experience for many students who had been intimidated by the library. The second semester included: homework on the use of keywords, evaluating articles, and using databases to find articles.

Success was measured through undergraduate student evaluations and graduate student interviews, and the results were positive. The undergraduate students felt empowered by the fact that could find books and articles. Teaching assistants felt that they learned how to incorporate information literacy into their courses. They also reported better skills in evaluating articles, conducting literature reviews, and building citation documents. The program addresses issues of scalability and instruction but also creates collaborators for the future. Many of the teaching assistants will become faculty, scholars, and museum professionals. Watkins feels that they will continue to be advocates for libraries and libraries in their professional work.

The train-the-trainer program has evolved to include three training sessions per semester, expanded activities, and more homework activities. Watkins is also aligning the program

with the ACRL Framework, including more discussions on citation analysis using the BEAT method (scholarship is a conversation), and introducing concepts related to article evaluation (authority is constructed and contextual).

Embedded Faculty: Flipping the Concept of Embedded Librarianship to Create New Collaborations

Skye Lacerte, Modern Graphic History Library Curator, Special Collections, Washington University

Lacerte began her presentation with an overview of the Modern Graphic History Library at Washington University. The collection is primarily focused on 20th century illustration, advertising, and popular American visual culture. Many items from their collection, including sketchbooks and proofs, document artistic processes.

Under new leadership, Washington University sought to build relationships and secure campus support through embedded librarianship. At the Modern Graphic History Library, a reversal of this concept resulted in an embedded faculty director, a paid position within the library. The faculty member chosen for this position already had a long-standing relationship with the library, and served a dual appointment in the School of Design and Visual Arts. The primary goals of this position are to enhance outreach and programming, fundraising and recognition, and the use of the collection by students and scholars. The faculty director teaches workshops, incorporates collections into courses, gives lectures, offers input on collection development, and partners with staff to curate exhibitions. As a noted scholar in the field, the faculty director has successfully increased visibility and use of the Modern Graphic History Library.

Although the faculty director position has been largely beneficial, there have also been a few challenges. There is some confusion in reporting structure since the faculty director does not report to anyone with the Modern Graphic History Library or Special Collections. Other challenges include access to collections, handling of materials, questions related to budgets, general communication issues, and the dedication of staff time to faculty director projects.

Q & A

Faculty can sometimes exert a high level of control over teaching assistantships and courses, and egos can be a problem. How did you address the faculty/librarian ego divide?

Watkins did not find that faculty egos were an obstacle for his program at the University of Colorado Boulder. In order to gain the support of the teaching assistants, he recommended finding any avenues for engagement with the department, particularly with the graduate students. Morrison agreed that it was helpful that Watkins was already involved with the art history graduate students through consultations, advising, and student groups.

Have other librarians at your university approached you about trying this program with other disciplines?

Watkins's program is still fairly new and has not been used by librarians in other disciplines. He explained that this program was designed for the art history curriculum and may not be relevant for other disciplines that are structured differently.