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Positioning Librarians as Co-educators

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Population Served

The University of California, Riverside (UCR), is a public research university with R1 status located in the Inland Empire region of Southern California. UCR enrolls approximately 23,000 students (of those, about 20,000 are undergraduates) and retains 1,100 faculty. It is both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). A 2018 national analysis showed that UCR enrolls and graduates more Pell Grant recipients than any other research university in the US, and 58 percent of undergraduates are first-generation college students.[1] There is a significant population of commuter students, and a growing number of transfer, veteran, international, and nontraditional-age undergraduate students. All of these factors influence the architecture of UCR's information literacy program, which must meet the needs of students with vastly different life experiences, who have varying amounts of time that they can spend on school-related activities, across fifty-five different undergraduate majors, at scale.

Program Scope

The Department of Teaching and Learning is responsible for the vision and execution of the UCR Library's information literacy program. The majority of the department's attention is focused on the undergraduate experience, from the moment that students arrive on campus for orientation to completing capstone projects and papers. Most support for graduate students comes from our Research Services Department. The major exception to this is the initial graduate student orientation, which is a collaborative effort between departments. Other interactions between Teaching and Learning and upper-level graduate students and faculty tend to be around the pedagogy of information literacy (IL) for undergraduate courses, rather than information literacy for those populations themselves.

The varying nature of our student body, as well as the lack of a single pathway (or even just a few) through the undergraduate experience means that our information literacy program cannot take for granted previous research or library experience and also needs to provide differentiated experiences for those students who have either worked with the UCR Library previously or who enter college with more familiarity or fluency with IL concepts.

Developing a baseline understanding of library services on an R1 campus is key for our unit, given the large percentage of our student body who are the first in their family to access higher education. To this end, the largest portion of the department's time is spent in providing information literacy instruction for three very large introductory courses: an introductory writing course that is taught across three quarters (ENGL 1A-B-C), an introductory chemistry course (CHEM 001A), and an introductory biology laboratory course (BIOL 005LA). Across these three courses, we reach several thousand students each quarter, with the intention that most matriculating students will encounter a library session at least once in their undergraduate careers. Two key challenges are to differentiate the information literacy content of each course and to make it relevant to the goals of the individual course and discipline.

Our information literacy program also conducts workshops with upper-level courses across every academic unit, with each session individually tailored to course goals. We employ a less programmatic approach to these courses, working with individual instructors on an opt-in basis, but anticipate working with departments to sequence skills in the near future.

Almost all of our instruction is conducted in person, but we recently piloted opt-in online instruction for the BIOL 005LA courses, with the intention of offering more asynchronous options for students, especially for library workshops that do not meet at the normal class time. These pilots were incredibly popular with students, filling up quickly. Interestingly, we found that some students preferred the online option even when they were on campus or in the library(!) at the same time.

We are also in the early stages of developing a suite of online learning modules that will be used for addressing library orientation–type learning goals (e.g., How do I find the library's hours?). The goal of this project is to provide a uniform learning experience for all incoming students for information that otherwise has previously been addressed only in first-year writing classes where instructors opt in to library instruction (and some students test out of the sequence). An online learning object of this type, used as part of orientation, will also allow us to spend the limited in-person time that we have with

students to actively facilitate more complex concepts related to their courses, including ideas from the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.[2]

Operations

Historically at UCR, information literacy instruction was divided between traditional reference librarians in the humanities/social science library and the science library. This led to a bifurcated approach to information literacy and limited the potential for developing a teaching community of practice across disciplinary lines. As part of a larger reorganization process in 2017, the Department of Teaching and Learning was created to centralize teaching efforts in one library department and to focus both the work and the professional development of librarians in that department on teaching without dividing attention between the traditional trio of high-level reference, teaching, and collection development.

This new unit is staffed by six librarians, one staff coordinator, and the department director. Each teaching librarian has a specific disciplinary alignment or user population for which they focus on developing additional skills and training; in addition, all teaching librarians support the large introductory courses in writing and the sciences. The teaching librarian positions are

- *Arts and Humanities Teaching Librarian:* Works with courses in the visual arts, humanities, music, and business. Has specialized knowledge of visual literacy.
- *Social Sciences Teaching Librarian:* Works with courses in the social sciences, education, and gender and ethnic studies. Has specialized knowledge in data literacy.
- *STEM Teaching Librarian:* Works with courses in the sciences, engineering, and mathematics. Has specialized knowledge in science information literacy.
- *Early Experience Teaching Librarian:* Develops approaches and coordinates staffing for the large entryway undergraduate courses, as well as plans orientations for all of our user populations.
- *University Programs Teaching Librarian:* Provides information literacy instruction and support for non-major and non-curricular programs, such as prestigious undergraduate fellowships, the honors program, the undergraduate student journal, and international student programs.
- *Primary Source Literacy Teaching Librarian:* Works primarily with classes that utilize primary source materials from our Special Collections and University Archives. Has specialized knowledge in teaching with archives and unique materials.

The staff coordinator processes requests for instruction from faculty and course instructors, as well as supervises the student-staffed reference service. The director supervises the department, advocates for the department both internally and externally to the library, and provides the structure for ongoing professional development and a teaching community of practice within the department (more in the Pedagogical Highlights section). All of the librarian positions (including the director) contribute to teaching the large undergraduate courses.

One major goal of the department reorganization was to localize all teaching within the unit, so other departments do not participate in the undergraduate teaching program, with a few exceptions when teaching librarians colead classes on specialized topics with research services librarians (such as upper-level classes that need GIS instruction). Orientation

events do include librarians from research services and collection strategies, but we do not consider them part of the curriculum-integrated information literacy program.

Teaching and Learning is supported by library administration with a small budget, which is primarily intended for teaching supplies and professional development of librarians in the unit. The director has relatively broad discretion in spending the budget and has used it to purchase whiteboard paint for a classroom space that previously did not have a writing surface, webinar fees for the entire department, and other departmental supplies related to teaching (e.g., whiteboard markers, index cards). The spending of this budget is transparent to the department, and it is updated on any spending at biweekly department meetings. Department members are also asked to submit requests and ideas that require a relatively small amount of resources (> $200), which are then usually discussed as a department. This transparency with the budget was crucial for building trust in our department and helping to establish a feeling of shared ownership over the work of the new unit.

Beyond the fiscal, Teaching and Learning is strongly supported by library administration via advocacy for the unit's work on campus, latitude in designing the unit's approach to information literacy work, and help in including the department in campus-wide conversations about undergraduate education and pedagogy. While there is no other unit on campus that is focused on information literacy support, there are many commonalities in approach and mission with units such as the Division of Undergraduate Education (including the campus instructional design team and the new Center for Teaching and Learning). Library administrators have helped to open doors to these conversations and send a steady stream of referrals to our department.

Marketing

We are not currently promoting one-shot instruction as we are at maximum capacity with honoring historical commitments to introductory courses, but as we transition those courses to less librarian labor–intensive strategies, we intend to meet with departments and advocate for specific moments of information literacy instruction in the major degree pathways, using curriculum maps as a guide. However, despite not currently marketing our services beyond brief mentions at New Faculty Orientation, we have seen about a 50 percent increase in number of course requests in eighteen months, most likely both because of word of mouth and because we have been reaching out directly to course instructors who assign scavenger hunt–type assignments to participate in library instruction rather than send 300+ students to the reference desk.

Collaboration

We work closely with Undergraduate Education (which includes Assessment) to support undergraduate research across the curriculum and determine pathways through majors. The Dean and Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education are two of our biggest allies on campus and have been crucial in the library being included in conversations about teaching on campus. In 2018, we were included in the campus-wide Celebration of Teaching in May and have an open invitation to host workshops and events in collaboration

with the new Center for Teaching and Learning. We cosponsored our first workshop with the center in spring 2018, focused on open educational resources. This event was also cosponsored by our local chapter of CALPIRG (California Public Interest Research Group) and campus IT and included voices from faculty who had transitioned courses to OERs and students who had either benefited from those courses or struggled to afford course materials.

Developing and maintaining relationships with campus partners is critical for the success of our reimagined information literacy program. In fact, it would not be overstating it to say that, without collaboration, our model would not succeed. One of the core tenets of our program is to develop programs and initiatives only in collaboration with other campus entities and departments so that we have a better chance of having students attend sessions and better understand the context of their needs. In other words, we are no longer offering drop-in IL workshops targeted at undergraduates. At the moment, our most significant curricular focuses are with the Writing Program, chemistry department, and biology department. We are also supporting cocurricular collaborations with the Writing Center, a small number of prestigious undergraduate fellowship programs, and international student programs. As we cement these relationships and solidify our approaches and assessments for these programs, we plan to expand outreach to new programs within those units, as well as approaching new strategic campus partners with (ideally) evidence of past successful collaborations.

Assessment

Historically, our IL program has not had a significant assessment component, so that has been one of the main focuses of our redesigned unit—How can we tell if students are learning in our sessions? At the moment, all of our assessment efforts are being undertaken by the department as a whole—we're designing assessments to use in our large introductory classes that we can then analyze in aggregate. Our first major undertaking was to design, in collaboration with the coordinator of BIOL 005LA, a pre- and post-assessment tightly targeted around the learning goal of learners being able to find an academic journal article based on popular press coverage. This assessment arose from the (honest) question of whether or not students inherently knew how to find this kind of evidence intuitively. This assessment effort is a test case for the types of assessments we'd like to continue to focus on as a program: deeply collaborative with an academic department, answering a question about student learning that we are genuinely curious about and could influence how and where we teach, tightly focused on evidence of learners' retention and transfer of skills, and IRB-approved from the beginning so that we can share out results with the broader IL community.

We are not yet continuously part of campus assessment and accreditation efforts, but we feel that conducting these types of assessments will be useful for those efforts in the future. While our in-house assessment efforts are still in the early phases, we intend to use them primarily as reflective tools for designing our instruction, with a secondary goal of using any positive results to demonstrate the efficacy of our teaching efforts.

Role of the One-Shot

We do think there's a role for one-shots, especially in upper-level courses, but would like to see them more as the beginning of a conversation than a magic bullet for indoctrinating students in research. To this end, we are banking on a consultative model that allows for IL to be approached multiple times within a course or degree program, rather than on just a single day—while the librarian may work with a course in person only once, they can work with the instructor to help design assignments or syllabi so that the ideas of IL can be incorporated throughout the quarter. We've also designed a number of activities and tools that instructors can take and adapt on their own or with librarian guidance. In all honesty, given the size of our department and current and potential demands for IL instruction, the one-shot has to be our primary mode of operating, but we're thinking of it as part of a constellation of IL instruction throughout the undergraduate experience, rather than a lone event.

Pedagogical Highlights

When we re-formed our department in September 2017, creating a shared set of values about how we would approach our teaching was crucial. For that reason, one of the first things we did was collaboratively create such a list:

- We encourage curiosity and lifelong learning.
- We aim to identify, develop, and teach resources and tools to help learners thrive in their research-focused coursework.
- Our methods are grounded in evidence-based best practices in response to changing learner needs and learning environments.
- We strive to be reflective in our learner-centered pedagogical approaches, and encourage and support creative approaches to teaching information literacy.[3]

This was our first step toward creating a library community of practice around teaching, helping us to identify the factors that we cared about most (evidence-based practice, empathy, context awareness) so that we could grow in those areas together.

Within the first month of the department, we began meeting every other week for forty-five minutes to begin exploring these issues together. For the first quarter of the year, each session would ask department members to either read a brief article or write a short reflection on a theme related to "How do people learn, and what is learning?" For example, one week, we read and discussed "Do Learners Really Know Best? Urban Legends in Education" by Paul Kirschner and Jeroen van Merriënboer to examine our assumptions about our learners.[4] Another week, we engaged in a reflective exercise borrowed from *The Courage to Teach*, writing down "a moment when things were going so well that you knew you were born to teach and a moment when things were going so poorly that you wished that you had never been born."[5] In our third quarter, we focused on instructional design principles,

including a daylong retreat facilitated by an outside instructional designer. Setting aside time and space for us to intentionally think and talk about our teaching practices, as a group, has been the most important part of developing our teaching community within the department.

Even less formally, we have standing thirty-minute meetings each week where people can come and share things that went well for them in teaching that week, or that went poorly, and ask for feedback from one another on both. People aren't expected to attend every week, but the whole department almost always attends. It's a low-stakes way to maintain our connection to one another as teachers and learn.

Continuous learning and developing as teachers is deeply important for us as a department, as we try to position ourselves as equal educators to our faculty colleagues. If we have a department that is solely about teaching and learning, then we *have* to be knowledgeable about what we are doing. So having this kind of dedicated time and space is nonnegotiable, and it's been critical to have administrative support for doing so.

Administrative Highlights

In addition to having a set of core values that are externally facing, we wrote a set of values for how we want to work together in the department:

- A success for one member of the team is a success for us all. We also celebrate individual successes, and appreciate and value the labor of our colleagues.
- As challenges arise, we work together to create a solution.
- We strive to embody a community of respect, within our team and the greater campus community.
- We practice an ethic of care for one another, as we believe this leads us to understand, improve, and nurture our environment, as well as ourselves.

This list led to us creating a clear-cut set of expectations for each other, both as teammates and in the managerial relationship, which we keep on our internal wiki. It includes items such as meeting structures and agenda deadlines, expectations for answering emails (including not at night or on weekends), asking for help when needed, and "You don't have to be perfect, you do have to try, reflect on your experiences, and grow." This has been helpful for working together as colleagues, specifically with regard to the balance of labor, time to plan and learn, and thinking about how best to support one another. As we are tempted to bite off more than we can chew, we can return to these two sets of values to help set boundaries, as well as prioritizing.

Information Literacy Coordinator Profile

I was an information literacy coordinator at my previous institution; in that role, I was frustrated in feeling that it always felt as if teaching was taking a back seat to other duties

in terms of time and attention. A major reason that I was interested in this position is that it is explicitly managerial—on par with other department heads, and similarly resourced. Rather than spending my time arguing for why we should spend time and resources on teaching, I can focus on how we spend that time and resources.

I spend the majority of my time managing the department—meeting one-on-one with librarians, planning team professional development, leading team meetings, representing the unit on the library's leadership team, writing reviews, meeting with campus partners. That said, I still teach about 10 percent of our one-shots, as I think it's important for me to continue to understand the work by doing it. But I'm fortunate in that it's my decision to do that, and I'm not expected to teach *more* than everyone else (which was how I felt as a coordinator).

The formality of the role, with dedicated staffing, has been a game changer for me in terms of what I think we can accomplish. Pedagogical growth isn't something we are trying to shoehorn in, but rather central to the roles of each person in our department. My coordinator experience definitely helped me to define what I wanted from the role of director and how I thought a department focused on IL could and should operate.

What I Wish People Knew

One of the most challenging parts of the coordination role has been feeling empowered to say no and helping others in my department to say no. But since we have a clearly defined number of people and amount of time, we have to decline participation in some courses or ask to be included next time when we can devote the attention required to do a good job. That's been one of the hardest things to learn: that when you say yes to everything, it means you can't do things as well. So one hard-won lesson has been to learn to say no in a productive way that leaves the door open to future collaborations.

Notes

1. Wesley Whistle and Tamara Heller, "The Pell Divide: How Four-Year Institutions Are Failing to Graduate Low- and Moderate-Income Students," Third Way, May 1, 2018, https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-pell-divide-how-four-year-institutions-are-failing-to-graduate-low-and-moderate-income-students; University of California Riverside, "First Generation," accessed September 27, 2018, http://firstgen.ucr.edu.
2. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.
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