THE TEACHING LIBRARY

Approaches to Assessing Information Literacy Instruction

SCOTT WALTER
EDITOR

The Teaching Library: Approaches to Assessing Information Literacy Instruction

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The Teaching Library: Approaches to Assessing Information Literacy Instruction

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Introduction: Telling the Story of the Teaching Library

Scott Walter

As this collection of essays goes to press, the American higher education community has made a fascinating discovery: "College students and high-school students preparing to enter college are sorely lacking in the skills needed to retrieve, analyze, and communicate information online" (Foster, 2006, p. A36). What was the catalyst for this discovery? Was it the result of the work of the librarians who have delivered direct instruction to college students over the past 30 years (Rader, 2002) or of university administrators becoming familiar with the rich literature exploring the assessment of information literacy skills among college students (Bober, Poulin, & Vileno, 1995; Knight, 2002; Lindauer, 2004; Merz & Mark, 2002; Meulemans, 2002)? Was it a reward for the work of librarians who have effectively and creatively integrated their efforts to assess student learning into broader campus initiatives such as General Education (Rockman, 2002), Writing Across the Curriculum (Elmborg & Hook, 2005), or the establishment of campus teaching centers (Jacobson, 2001)? Sadly, it was none of those things. It was, as is so often the case at all levels of American education, the result of a standardized test.

The Educational Testing Service's "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Assessment" instrument–developed

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in collaboration with a number of college and university libraries (Rockman & Smith, 2005)–is what captured the attention of the higher education community in late 2006 with reports that its pilot programs showed that "only 13 percent of the test takers were information literate" (Foster, 2006, p. A36). In an educational environment increasingly engaged with the twin concepts of assessment and accountability, the promise of the ETS ICT instrument to deliver quantifiable data on students' ability "to find, use, manage, evaluate and convey information efficiently and effectively" (ETS, 2006) is compelling. ETS, in short, has told a powerful story about the central place of information literacy in the curriculum and is engaged in recruiting librarians and faculty members to the mission of spreading that story through the power of its reputation in the field of educational assessment and the appeal that an easily understood data point like "only 13 percent of test takers were information literate" has for many administrators. I applaud the efforts of ETS leadership, and I am happy that they have chosen to develop this instrument with the input of academic librarians (some of whom have contributed to this collection), but I wonder if an easily understood data point (no matter how alluring) is what we need as the foundation for the teaching library.

Academic librarians have been engaged in the direct instruction of library users for a very long time (Tucker, 1980; Salony, 1995), but it has only been in recent decades that the "instruction movement" has allowed us to articulate the depth of our contributions to teaching and learning on campus. At the dawn of the current era of accountability in education, Stoffle, Guskin, and Boisse (1984) articulated very effectively the degree to which campus support for the library might erode if "the educational and community service role of the library . . . [remains] largely unrealized" (p. 3). Rather than allowing the library to be defined by its role in the collection and preservation of materials, they argued, librarians should embrace the idea of the "teaching library," i.e., a library that is "directly involved in advancing all aspects of the mission of institutions of higher education" (p. 5). A teaching library, they continued, is characterized by its commitment to instruction as a core library service and by a robust instructional service program that reflects not only the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom, but also that which goes on in the co-curriculum, the extra-curriculum, and the surrounding community.

The rise of "information literacy" as a model for defining the contribution that librarians make to the education of college students has helped to shape the vast array of library-based and collaborative instructional

programs reported in the literature over the past 15 years. Moreover, librarian interest in contributing to the teaching and learning of college students has dovetailed with the broader interest in student learning outcomes that has arisen throughout the academy during that same period of time (Walter, 2005). Snavely (2000) articulated how this broader evolution of thinking about college teaching might affect the work of librarians as teachers, and argued that in the "learning library" we would need new measures by which to tell the story of the significance of our instructional work to the campus and its students. Gratch-Lindauer (2005) built on this foundation by enumerating the ways in which mastery of information literacy skills might contribute to emergent discussions about assessing the depth and quality of students' "engagement" with their college experience (Kuh & Gonyea, 2003).

Whether we take as our model the teaching library, the learning library, or the engaged library, the message is clear: if we cannot tell the story of the academic library's contribution to student learning and of the significance of libraries to broader issues within a rapidly-evolving higher education environment, we will be left behind. Assessment is the tool by which the story of the teaching library is assembled and the process through which we demonstrate our direct contribution to student learning, faculty development, and the instructional mission of the college campus.

Samson and McLure open this collection with their description of a "cycle of assessment" at the University of Montana–a multifaceted approach to assessment that allows librarians to identify their own goals for instructional improvement, and also allows library leaders to evaluate the scope and success of their instructional program. Through their use of online tools supporting the collection, manipulation, and dissemination of data, Montana librarians are able to tell both the story of the teaching library writ large, as well as more narrowly focused tales ("short stories") aimed at key campus constituencies. Their description of how a robust program of data collection and analysis across a variety of instructional activities can support the redefinition of positions within the library, as well as the placement of librarians on key campus committees aligned with campus-wide instructional initiatives provides lessons for us all.

A multifaceted approach to assessment is also essential to the story being told at Cornell University where, as Tancheva, Andrews, and Steinhart describe, quantitative and qualitative research methods have been brought to bear on the question of assessing the effectiveness of information literacy instruction. Their research demonstrates not only

that students can make measurable progress in demonstrating mastery of information literacy skills, but also that we must think carefully about the way in which assessment measures are crafted and their results used to promote a vision of a teaching library. Focus group participants at Cornell, for example, expressed satisfaction with the quality of the instructional services provided to them by their librarians, but did not recognize that these services were being delivered as part of a coordinated instructional program designed around well-defined areas of information skill. We must not only demonstrate that our students are learning, they suggest, but we must use that data strategically to help our supporters understand that the teaching that we do is designed to meet specific learning outcomes for our students as part of a systematic approach to building an information literacy instruction program on campus.

McMillen and Deitering echo some of the concerns found in the Cornell study in their description of information literacy instruction at Oregon State University. The academic library, they write, occupies a "unique position" in the instructional framework of the college campus, and any assessment of the effectiveness of the library's instructional program must be designed to take that position into account. Course portfolios, for example, have emerged as an appealing means of assessing the quality of teaching and learning in the traditional academic class (Bernstein et al., 2006), but how might they be adapted to the limited contact time with students under which many instruction librarians work? Likewise, we might ask to what degree are models designed to assess the effectiveness of team teaching during a full-semester course (Davis, 1995) applicable to the instructional collaboration (or lack thereof) found so often in the information literacy instruction environment? Like their colleagues at Cornell, McMillen and Deitering demonstrate the importance of a multi-faceted approach to assessment of instruction. Further, they demonstrate the importance, for anyone hoping to find an audience for the story of the teaching library, of weaving information literacy assessment activities into broader campus initiatives aimed at the assessment of student learning.

One way in which Oregon State has promoted discussion of the central position of instruction in library services is to enumerate teaching and learning goals as part of the library's mission and vision statements. Schroeder and Mashek, too, demonstrate the ways in which a commitment to building a teaching library can find a place in core mission, vision, and values statements. Their example of the "Reference Mission" statement embraced at Wartburg College and its connection to an organizational commitment to information literacy instruction not only shows

us how the reference mission can be articulated within an instructional framework, but also complements the results of the research reported by their colleagues at Cornell, who noted that focus group participants considered the reference interaction to be a fundamentally instructional interaction. Elmborg (2002) has written persuasively about how a commitment to the teaching role of the librarian can transform the reference interaction, and Wartburg provides a useful example of how that transformation might be reflected at the organizational level.

The leadership demonstrated by the library director and the information literacy instruction team at Wartburg dovetails with the case study of program development provided by Brasley. Her description of the Information Literacy Initiative at the University of Southern California demonstrates how important it is to develop assessment mechanisms designed not only to tell the story of the teaching library to external audiences of students, faculty, and administrators, but also to internal audiences made up primarily of our own professional colleagues. The teaching-centered mission statements of the Vogel Library at Wartburg College send a powerful message across the library of the instructional mission of the academic library, and so did the work of the USC "interest groups," who used data collected through assessment activities to build momentum for changes within the instruction program.

Momentum is also the name of the game at the University of Central Florida where, as Beile reports, librarians were able to successfully tie information literacy assessment to campus-wide assessment activities. UCF provides an example of how information literacy can become part of broader campus discussions, and how the successful transmission of the story of the teaching library can quickly launch librarians into campus-wide discussions of instructional design, delivery, and assessment that require new commitments of human resources. Beile's example of how information literacy assessment data can be used to support individual program reviews, likewise, provides a useful model for any of us on a campus where individuals, departments and schools are struggling with the question of how to identify end-of-program learning outcomes that can be presented to institutional or disciplinary accreditation teams.

Finally, the last essays in this collection provide case studies in the application of assessment methods to specific instructional models. Coulter, Clarke, and Scamman explore how one might assess the impact of the one-shot instruction session on student learning. Goebel, Neff, and Mandeville explore assessment of information literacy instruction in an academic environment supportive of the credit-course model. And, perhaps most interesting from a professional perspective, Searing

explores how assessment activities can support the promotion of information literacy instruction among the faculty members who we might expect to be the most interested in this work–Library and Information Science (LIS) educators. Together, this trio of studies describes assessment of information literacy within the most common instructional models available to academic librarians.

In the end, the question of how one chooses to tell the story of the teaching library will depend very much on the culture of one's library and the culture of one's institution. The essays collected here, however, illuminate one guiding principle for academic librarians–hoping that your students, your colleagues, and your campus leaders will recognize and reward your instructional efforts for their intrinsic value is a losing proposition. If libraries are to continue to be recognized as vital organs of the body academic worthy of significant and ongoing financial support, then we must be prepared to demonstrate our direct contribution to student learning in ways consistent with those that have been accepted as valid across our campuses. Each of the essays presented in this volume should identify at least one assessment practice that you might adapt for use at your library, and each should demonstrate the importance of telling the story of the teaching library across your campus.

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Library Instruction Assessment Through 360°

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SUMMARY. A new model of library instruction assessment–a 360° analysis–is needed to address the many facets of the teaching process. This model establishes interconnections in all aspects of instruction and requires a multi-faceted approach that incorporates assessment in every stage of teaching and learning. At The University of Montana Mansfield Library, the design and development of the library instruction program is being purposefully evolved into a cycle in which assessment is embedded through 360°, is integrated at the program level, addresses the individual needs and professional development of library teaching faculty, provides substantive data for communication with administrators and the campus community, and builds on the cycle of assessment defined by Angelo and Cross (1993). doi:10.1300/J295v03n01_02

KEYWORDS. Information literacy, library instruction, assessment, teaching portfolios, learning outcomes, teaching effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

Academic library instruction has its own unique place in the Academy. Usually not part of the required curriculum, library instruction functions within a collaborative curriculum-integrated environment that places it within a myriad of programs, collegial partnerships, legacy initiatives, and student-centered activities. The Information Age has fostered the growth of library instruction programs, now widely adopted across university campuses of all sizes and research levels (Rockman & Smith, 2005). This program growth, in tandem with the demands of university administration and accrediting bodies to include assessment in all program reviews, has fostered efforts to develop, strengthen, and embed assessment of library instruction within the library mission (Rockman, 2002; Thompson, 2002).

Assessment is the basis of student-centered learning and teaching and should be a cornerstone of an effective library instruction program (Mark & Boruff-Jones, 2003). It is particularly important that libraries integrate assessment into their instruction since much of that instruction occurs within the framework of credit classes offered by non-library teaching faculty. This paper focuses on multiple levels of assessment that create a circle of assessment through 360°. In particular, it addresses the multiple, compelling reasons to fully integrate assessment into library instruction and to use assessment data to implement change within the program, improve the pedagogy of individual library teaching faculty, substantiate the value of information fluency in the Academy, and corroborate the interconnected missions of the academic library and its institution (Iannuzzi, 1999).

ASSESSMENT: AN OVERVIEW

According to Gilchrist (2001), assessment of student learning provides the ability to know what you are doing in the classroom, know why you are doing it, know what students are learning as a result, and change based on this information. These basic elements of assessment are key to an instruction program that has direction and meets library and institutional missions. Substantive assessment data based on concrete learning outcomes and instruction effectiveness can be used to improve an ongoing instruction program and used further to build collaborative alliances with teaching faculty as a marketing tool for the library as a whole (D'Angelo, 2001).