

Instructional Improvement Programs

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Instructional Improvement Programs

August 2005

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Librarians have contributed to the educational mission of colleges and universities by providing instruction to faculty, staff, and students on the use of information resources for more than a century. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the amount of direct instruction provided to faculty, staff, and students by librarians through formal instruction programs, and increased attention to the conduct and quality of instructional services in libraries. While academic libraries have been the focus of much of the research on instructional services, instruction programs are also found in public libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions. How do librarians and other information professionals in these institutions become effective teachers?

Despite both the historic professional commitment to the librarian as teacher, and the increasing centrality of instructional responsibilities for many information professionals now employed in libraries and affiliated organizations, very few librarians are prepared to teach as part of their professional education. Little research exists on how librarians improve their teaching skills, or how such skills are evaluated as part of the formal review of professional performance. While there is a literature emerging on the assessment of student learning through information literacy instruction, we know far less about the paths that librarians pursue if

they are interested in becoming better teachers or the degree to which campus instructional improvement programs have influenced professional development programs for librarians regarding their teaching role. As little as we know about this situation in academic libraries, we know even less about the ways in which librarians and other information professionals in public libraries, special libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions go about improving their work as teachers in order to support educational programming.

Given the significance of their instructional role, it is important to identify the ways in which librarians with little training in pedagogy, instructional design, or assessment of student learning meet the challenge of becoming effective teachers. Likewise, it is important to identify the ways in which libraries as organizations help librarians become more successful in the classroom, and the degree to which classroom performance is evaluated during formal professional reviews.

This study sought to identify the activities that ARL member libraries pursue in order to assist librarians in becoming more effective teachers and the ways in which library administrators have incorporated assessment of instructional performance into formal methods of professional review. Designed to complement the focus on student evaluation found in SPEC Kit 279 *Evaluating Library Instruction* (December 2003), the focus of this study

is on the librarian as teacher, the organizational culture of libraries, and the contemporary form of in-house training programs that are focused on instructional improvement.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, *professional development* is intended to refer to any activities pursued by an individual to enhance his or her professional knowledge or skills. Professional development activities may include independent reading, workshop attendance, completion of advanced coursework, discussion with colleagues, etc. *Instructional improvement* refers to those professional development activities focused on enhancing one's performance in the classroom or in other instructional venues (e.g., Web-based instruction for distance learners). Instructional improvement activities may include any of the types of professional development identified above, as well as classroom observation, consultation with master teachers, creation of teaching portfolios, etc.

Summary of Findings

Seventy-three of the 123 ARL member libraries responded to the instructional improvement programs survey for a response rate of 59%. Sixty-five of these libraries (89%) reported they had addressed how to assess or improve library instruction programs or performance over the past three years. Although eight (11%) indicated they had not, some of these libraries reported engaging in one or more well-defined instructional improvement activities. It may be that these respondents did not perceive their activities to be formal enough to be considered a "program," but it is clear that some attention to instructional improvement is almost universal among responding organizations. Whatever the final percentage of organizations that report engaging in instructional improvement activities, it is heartening to see such broad-based attention to this topic among ARL member libraries, especially

in light of increasing library activity in the instruction arena.

Organizational Culture

Librarians have various statuses in academic organizations and a range is represented in the institutions responding to this survey. Thirty respondents (43%) reported that librarians hold faculty status at their institutions, while twenty-eight (40%) reported a status of academic/administrative professionals. Five (7%) reported that there is a mix of faculty and academic/administrative professional status at their institutions and seven (10%) indicated some other status, for example, public librarians, government librarians, and librarians holding the status of "faculty equivalent." In addition, one institution reported that librarians' current status of "professional/managerial" is under review.

Teaching experience emerged as a factor in hiring decisions at almost all institutions (66 responses or 93%). Fifteen (21%) prefer it for new hires and fifty-one (72%) report it is a factor for certain positions. Six respondents require and twenty-three prefer teaching experience for reference/instruction librarians. It is preferred to a greater or lesser degree for all other categories of librarians who participate in instruction programs.

Sixty-five institutions (92%) report that librarians are evaluated on their instructional work as part of an annual or professional review process; only six (8%) do not include instruction in the review process. The most common methods of evaluation are self-report/reflection, supervisor evaluation of instruction, and student evaluation of instruction. While 41 of the respondents (58%) have a mentoring program in the library, only 16 (23%) report having one that includes orientation to teaching responsibilities as a significant part of the program.

Instructional Improvement Program Characteristics

Understanding how instructional programs are

administered offers insight into how instructional improvement programs might be organized. Instructional services in the responding libraries are most commonly coordinated by an individual in a more broadly focused unit such as the reference department (22 responses or 31%) or by a head of instruction in an independent instruction unit (20 or 28%). Fourteen respondents (20%) coordinate instructional services at the unit level. Only three (4%) reported that there is no instruction coordinator. Some institutions reported hybrid forms of coordination involving an individual coordinator and a committee or team. The complexities of coordination manifest in the responses to this question indicate this area deserves further research and documentation.

All but a few of the respondents provide support to librarians who want to improve their teaching skills. Most often the head of library instruction has primary responsibility for coordinating these instruction improvement opportunities (26 responses or 37%). Others who have this responsibility include the associate dean/director for public services, an instruction committee, and the head of reference/information services. Eleven respondents (16%) indicated that no one has formal responsibility for coordinating instructional improvement activities, perhaps indicating that attention to formal instructional improvement programs is lagging behind attention to instruction programs per se.

The responding libraries provide a broad range of professional development activities aimed at helping librarians to improve their teaching skills. Fifty-three, for example, have sponsored a librarian to attend the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program. In addition to supporting individual librarians to attend this program, respondents are also offering instructional improvement opportunities that can reach broader librarian audiences within the institution. Over 80% offer financial support to attend conferences on teaching,

access to professional materials related to teaching, and release time to attend conferences on teaching. More than half provide access to instructional design support, outside speakers on instructional issues, in-house training programs, orientation to teaching for new librarians, and release time for continuing education programs on teaching. Also commonly available are financial support for continuing education programs on teaching, a regular forum for discussing instruction issues, and sabbaticals or other professional development leaves for instruction-related projects. Less commonly available approaches to instructional improvement are videotaping of instruction, a teaching retreat, and workload reductions to focus on teaching. Only one library reported that it does not provide direct support for instructional improvement to its professionals.

Sixty-two of the respondents (88%) report that their campus has a teaching center and, of those, fifty-two (84%) report collaborating with that center in a variety of ways. Librarians are particularly active in providing workshops through the center on topics such as information resources, designing effective library assignments, integrating technology into teaching, and information literacy. At twenty-two institutions (36%), librarians participate in campus programs on assessment of teaching and learning and programs on promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning. The rich nature of these collaborative programs suggests another area for future research.

Of the 59 responding ARL member libraries that report their campus has an annual teaching award or instruction-related grants, 29 (52%) report that librarians are eligible for the award and 46 (82%) that they are eligible for the grants. Only 10 of the responding libraries (14%) sponsor a teaching award or recognition program for librarians.

In-House Training Programs

Forty-five of the responding libraries (63%) sup-

port an in-house training program for librarians and information professionals interested in improving their work as teachers. The training in these programs is most often delivered by instruction librarians. At about half of the libraries trainers may be any interested librarian, faculty/staff from the campus teaching center, or outside consultants. At a smaller number, trainers may be faculty from related disciplines or human resources/staff development professionals.

The most common topic for training is instructional techniques/teaching tips (42 responses or 93%), such as active learning. Given the rise in direct instruction, the demand for this sort of training is not surprising. Among the other more common topics are educational theory (such as learning styles), assessment of student learning, principles of instructional design, and collaboration with classroom faculty. Though less common, 40% (18 responses) also include training on self-assessment of instruction.

Summary of Documentation

The responding libraries submitted a variety of documents demonstrating activities related to instructional improvement programs. The examples reproduced herein provide potential models for other libraries to use in developing their own materials. [Editor's note: Although The Ohio State University was unable to participate in this survey, its representatives agreed to the inclusion of documents from their well-developed program.]

Organization Charts

The organization charts show both familiar and emerging models that demonstrate how libraries institutionalize an organizational commitment to instruction as a core service, on par with services like reference and collections. The examples provided range from the traditional approach of having an instruction coordinator as part of a reference unit to a number of options for what an independent instruction unit might look like.

Position Descriptions

The selected position descriptions exemplify positions with clearly articulated responsibilities for developing instructional improvement programs and/or evaluating program effectiveness/instructional effectiveness.

Orientation for Teaching Librarians

New librarians are likely to need an orientation to their teaching responsibilities, particularly if they did not receive an introduction to these responsibilities during their professional education. These examples provide descriptions of two such programs.

In-House Training Programs

In-house training programs are a very common approach to providing professional development for instructional improvement. These documents provide overviews of a range of well-developed training programs.

Competencies for Teaching Librarians

Identifying the competencies for quality instructional performance is valuable for improving instructional performance. One local statement is included. The Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries has recently charged a task force to articulate a statement of competencies, so a national benchmark may prompt additional local statements in the coming years.

Evaluation of Instruction by Supervisor

These selected documents demonstrate how instruction can be evaluated as part of an annual or professional review process.

Evaluation of Instruction by Students

SPEC Kit 279 focused on evaluating library instruction and included an extensive sampling of library instruction evaluation forms. Sample evaluation forms are included here, however, since student

feedback is an important component of instructional improvement.

Evaluation of Instruction by Peers

Peer feedback from other librarians is more common than student or faculty feedback. Several examples are included here.

Teaching Award Program and Teaching Portfolio

A noteworthy example of a library's teaching award is included along with instructions for the teaching portfolio that demonstrates the applicants' instructional activities.

Conclusion

Clearly, ARL member libraries are interested in supporting professional development in the area of teaching and learning, and in formally recognizing effective instruction as part of personnel actions such as appointment, annual review, promotion, and tenure. The fact that so many different combinations of instructional improvement activities make up the programs supported at these libraries suggests that this is an area ripe for further study and for the development of best practices.

The amount and variety of instructional improvement activities in ARL member libraries are commendable and demonstrate the centrality of

instructional services as a core academic library service. Libraries are particularly supporting participation in professional development activities related to teaching that are external to the library (e.g., campus events, outside speakers, conferences, the Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program), but two-thirds also offer in-house training programs. As the demand for instructional services continues to increase, the remaining third may wish to consider the benefits of establishing in-house training programs aimed at supporting all librarians who teach, not just those who are able to participate in external activities. Instructional improvement program development and the articulation of local models for assessment of instructional performance will continue to be significant issues requiring the attention of instruction coordinators and other library administrators.

Finally, program coordinators and administrators may wish to inquire into participation by individual information professionals in instructional improvement activities. Certainly librarians are participating given the range of activities supported; however, inquiry into which activities are most effective, who prefers what types of activities, and other individual-based questions are all fruitful areas for future research.

