Best Practices Application

Executive Summary
Library Instruction Program
James Madison University
Harrisonburg, VA

Contact: Rebecca Feind

The Library Instruction Program at James Madison University is a comprehensive, multi-faceted program that reaches students at two levels:

- basic instruction during the first year
- advanced instruction in the major

Basic instruction in information literacy is integrated into the General Education program using Go for the Gold, a web-based program with online exercises, along with course related assignments designed to give students experience in finding and evaluating information. Librarians provide formal training to General Education faculty annually to insure successful integration of information literacy into coursework. All first-year General Education students must pass an online Information-Seeking Skills Competency Test by the end of the year. In order to reach students at a more advanced level, the library has a liaison program. One of the main goals of the liaison program is to promote information literacy in all majors offered by the University. Librarians and teaching faculty work in partnership to plan and deliver instruction, assess skills, and evaluate programs.

Our program is unique in that information literacy is fully integrated into the General Education curriculum with formally stated learning objectives, web-based instruction, course-related assignments, and a locally developed competency test that all General Education students are required to pass. The test is administered in a 100-computer secure testing lab, administered by General Education. The Center for Assessment and Research Studies maintains a database of test results and collaborates with librarians and faculty in refining and improving the test. The basic instruction program also includes annual faculty training provided by librarians and funded by General Education. Our program is also unique in that the library liaison program provides for every academic department to have a librarian who promotes information literacy, provides instruction, and assesses whether students can effectively find and evaluate information. The liaison program sets the stage for extensive collaborative work with faculty, assessment specialists, and administrators.
Program Description

I. Name of Program and Team Members

Library Instruction Program at James Madison University

Lynn Cameron, Coordinator of Library Instruction and Liaison to Psychology and Geographic Science
Rebecca Feind, Faculty Outreach Coordinator for General Education and Liaison to English and Theater and Dance
Kathy Clarke, Liaison Librarian to the College of Business
Violet Allain, Associate Dean of General Education
Harry Reif, Assistant Professor of Computer Information Systems, College of Business

II. Brief history of program and synopsis of current activities

History
For nearly a quarter century, JMU has shown a strong commitment to teaching students information-seeking skills. JMU began its instruction program in the late seventies with reference librarians performing course-related instruction at the request of faculty.

In the early eighties, reference librarians developed a self-paced, individualized library skills workbook that was used for all first-year students taking English 101. In the mid-eighties, the library instituted a library liaison program in which librarians from all departments within the library were assigned to work with academic departments to provide instruction, work with faculty to develop the collection, and communicate important information about collections and services. From the beginning of the liaison program, the goal of the instruction program has been to teach all beginning students basic library skills and to teach all students in the major the sources and research strategies important to their field through course-related instruction performed by liaison librarians.

In the early nineties, JMU began planning a new General Education program, and librarians were a part of the planning process. The new competency-based curriculum included information-seeking skills as formally stated objectives. To support this new program, the library developed a web-based instruction program called Go for the Gold, which replaced the library workbook. Go for the Gold has been refined and improved each year. This web-based instruction program is completed by all first-year students taking introductory General Education courses.

In the late eighties, the library began to assess library skills using a locally developed multiple choice pencil and paper test on a large sample of several hundred students each year. This test evolved into an online Information-Seeking Skills Test (ISST), which is now in its third year of use as a competency test. All first-year General Education students must pass the ISST in order to register for additional courses at the University. In addition to the ISST, several liaison librarians have collaborated with faculty to develop assessment tests for specific majors.

As evidenced by the long history of this multifaceted instruction program, both faculty and
administrators at JMU view development of information-seeking and evaluation skills as critical to higher education and lifelong learning.

**Current activities**

The library instruction program aims to reach all students at two levels: 1) basic instruction in introductory General Education courses and 2) course-related instruction in the major. The program reaches around 10,000 students each year with about 3,000 completing Go for the Gold and about 7,000 receiving course-related instruction taught by fifteen liaison librarians.

First-year students demonstrate competency by passing the Information-Seeking Skills Test, which is administered in a proctored testing lab supported by the General Education Office. Librarians maintain and improve Go for the Gold and train faculty on how to incorporate information literacy into their courses, with particular emphasis on how to develop good course-related assignments. Librarians also support General Education by maintaining and improving the ISST in close collaboration with the Center for Assessment and Research Studies. Librarians serve on key General Education committees and participate in decision-making and evaluation, such as course approval, program reviews, and curricular development.

Liaison librarians are engaged in a number of activities to promote learning by students in the major. They perform traditional services such as providing course-related instruction upon request, developing handouts and web sites that list important sources, demonstrating search strategies, and meeting individually with students who need extra help. Many librarians go beyond traditional instruction services by collaborating with faculty to write learning objectives for the major, develop assessment tests, and integrate information literacy into a research-oriented required course. Some liaison librarians have played a major role in designing and teaching such a course. Some have developed and graded assignments that count toward the student’s grade. In addition to planning instructional activities and teaching, liaisons serve on program review committees related to the major.

The library demonstrates commitment to effective instruction by offering development activities for liaison librarians. Recent development activities include:

- A half-day seminar entitled “Back to Basics: Effective Teaching in the Classroom” with presentations on effective teaching and writing learning objectives by teaching faculty specializing in these areas. Liaison librarians also shared successful teaching techniques with their peers.
- A presentation entitled “What you can do in a 50-minute class” by a recent ACRL Immersion Program attendee.

In addition to liaison work, several librarians have taught credit courses on research skills for the Honors Program, Music, and Psychology.

**III. Best Practices Categories**

**Category 5: Articulation with the Curriculum**

The JMU Library had a longstanding relationship with the English Department with all sections of English 101 using a library skills workbook, when the University began planning for a
new General Education program in 1993. The Coordinator of Library Instruction was asked to serve on the planning committee. Since the new program would be competency-based, the faculty of the University were asked to submit learning objectives that would be appropriate for the General Education program. Librarians submitted two objectives relating to information literacy:

- formulate and conduct an information search that includes a variety of reference sources, such as encyclopedias, library catalogs, indexes, bibliographies, statistics sources, government publications, and resources available on the Internet;
- evaluate information sources in terms of accuracy, authority, bias, and relevance in written and oral contexts.

These objectives became two of nineteen common objectives for basic skills courses in General Education. The basic skills are writing, communication, critical thinking, information-seeking, and technology. The General Education program consists of five clusters of objectives that cover important subject areas. The courses in each cluster must reflect the learning objectives of that cluster. Basic Skills are taught in Cluster One and are considered to be foundational to the students’ subsequent work in General Education and their major or preprofessional program. Once the information literacy objectives became an integral part of General Education, librarians and faculty wrote more specific objectives, which overlap considerably with the ACRL objectives developed several years later. Using these specific objectives as a basis, the library developed a web-based program called Go for the Gold that has online exercises that are scored electronically. Student scores for all eight sets of exercises are stored in a database that can be viewed by faculty. This program is used by all Cluster One students.

Students are required to demonstrate competency on the information literacy objectives by passing a locally developed 53-item Information-Seeking Skills Test by the end of the first year. Students may not register for more courses at the University until they pass the test. The cut score for passing was set by a 12-member team of faculty, librarians, and assessment specialists using the “Bookmark” method. Having a competency test that all students must pass insures that faculty and students take the information literacy objectives seriously.

Faculty proposing new courses for General Education Cluster One must show how they will meet the information literacy objectives. Librarians sit on both the Cluster One Committee and the General Education Council, both of which make curricular decisions regarding the General Education program. Faculty must include in their proposal a sample syllabus that shows how Go for the Gold and course-related assignments that require students to find and evaluate information are incorporated into the course. When proposals have not addressed information literacy adequately, the librarian committee member has given feedback asking for revision. In all cases, faculty have made the requested changes.

An important part of articulation with the curriculum is training faculty. Each summer, a librarian provides training to Cluster One faculty on using Go for the Gold, making good course-related assignments, understanding the role of the Information-Seeking Skills Test, and becoming familiar with new sources and services the library has to offer. Librarians continue to provide support for General Education faculty throughout the year.
In addition to the integration of information seeking skills at the basic level in General Education, several liaison librarians have worked with departmental faculty to integrate information literacy into the curriculum of the major.

- The liaison for business has two class sessions with all business majors in a gateway class, COB 300 and then meets with the students in small groups later to assist with their assignments. After this gateway course, the business liaison meets again with classes in the business majors that have a library research component, further building on the skills acquired in the gateway course.
- The gateway course for the English major, ENG 299, includes an information literacy component. The liaison librarian meets twice with each section of ENG 299 to provide instruction on print and electronic reference sources for literature.
- The Psychology liaison instructs all sections of Experimental Psychology, also a required course, and students are required to complete PsycTUTOR, a web-based instruction program developed by the liaison for psychology majors as an assignment for the course. The psychology instruction program is based on learning objectives written collaboratively by the liaison librarian and the faculty, and these objectives are assessed by a locally developed test.
- The Health Sciences liaison provides instruction for each section of Health 151, a gateway course for majors. Following instruction, students are required to do exercises which she grades.

**Category 6: Collaboration with Classroom Faculty**

Librarians and faculty at JMU have a longstanding history of collaboration that has resulted in an instruction program that has received national recognition. Collaboration occurs at both the basic level and in the major. In fact, the library strategic plan emphasizes collaboration in two of its goals:

- Work toward successful integration of information-seeking skills into the General Education curriculum using the Go for the Gold system.
- Collaborate with faculty to integrate information-seeking skills into the curriculum of majors in academic programs. Identify required courses and work with faculty to incorporate library instruction and assignments into those courses.

At the basic level the history of collaboration goes back two decades when librarians developed a library skills workbook that became a requirement for all English 101 writing courses. Librarians maintained, revised, and published the workbook, and faculty assigned the workbook to their classes and graded the exercises. Beginning in 1994, when planning began for the new General Education program, collaboration reached a new level. Librarians and faculty developed and adopted learning objectives relating to information literacy as an integral part of the new program. Librarians and faculty also worked together to fit these objectives into courses in a meaningful way. Librarians developed Go for the Gold to address the objectives, and faculty assigned students to complete the program. To reinforce the skills learned, faculty made course-related assignments, often with assistance and advice from librarians. Librarians train faculty on how to use Go for the Gold and make good assignments, and faculty hold students accountable for completing the assignments. Nearly every year, librarians have made
improvements to Go for the Gold based on faculty suggestions. To hold students accountable for information literacy skills, librarians, faculty and assessment specialists developed and implemented the Information-Seeking Skills Test.

In working at the major level of instruction, collaborative work at JMU has been exemplary. In the early eighties, the library began a liaison program which provides for every academic department to have a librarian who provides instruction, develops the collection, and facilitates communication between the library and the departments. Through this program, librarians and faculty have developed strong ties that have resulted in improvements in the instruction program. Each librarian works with only one or two departments and can therefore take time to develop expertise in the subject area. Faculty have one librarian they can turn to for instruction or any kind of assistance. As a result of the liaison program, nearly every academic department at JMU requests library instruction for its majors. In several cases, liaisons have been able to target required courses for instruction and reach all students in the major. Several liaisons have written specific learning objectives, developed assessment tests that are administered on University Assessment day in the Spring Semester, and worked with faculty to design appropriate research assignments.

A recent example of improvement of a course-related assignment occurred with Telecommunications (CIS320), an introductory course for computer and information systems majors with a research paper assignment on telecommunications trends. In previous semesters, the resulting papers were less than satisfactory. The business librarian and the faculty member redesigned the flow of the assignment, changed the research instruction session to a process format, and followed up with students individually as needed. A test to assess research skills has been designed for this course and assignment.

One indicator of the success of the liaison program is that library staff and services received one of the highest ratings in the University Faculty Morale Survey conducted in Spring semester by the Faculty Senate. Of the over 400 faculty responding to the survey, 82.5 percent reported satisfaction with library staff and services.

Category 10: Assessment

Our assessment efforts have focused primarily on student learning. Information literacy assessment is conducted on two levels at James Madison University. For the first year of General Education, librarians, faculty, and assessment specialists developed and implemented an online competency test for information literacy. Information-seeking and evaluation skills are an integral part of the new competency-based General Education program. Following completion of a Web-based instruction program and course-related assignments, all JMU students are required to demonstrate competency in information literacy by passing the Information-Seeking Skills Test (ISST) by the end of their first year.

The 53-item ISST is composed of four subtests that deal with different content areas: reference sources; database searching; Internet searching; and ethics. The test also deals with two cognitive levels: application and knowledge. Faculty, librarians, and assessment specialists collaborated to set the passing score using the “Bookmark” method. The test, which has six different forms to help insure validity, is administered in a 100-computer proctored lab dedicated to assessment. Successful passing of the ISST is noted on the student’s transcript.
In addition to the basic competency test for information literacy, assessment of information literacy is conducted in several majors. Following are two examples:

- The Information Literacy Test for Psychology is administered to psychology seniors during the Spring semester. This online test consists of 43 multiple choice items that measures knowledge in four areas: basic skills, database searching, Internet, and evaluation of sources. The test measured both knowledge (33 items) and ability to apply knowledge by finding information in electronic sources (10 items). To answer the application questions, students were required to search the library catalog, the PsycINFO database, and the Internet to find answers.

- Health Sciences and Health Services Administration majors take the Information Literacy Test for Health Sciences. This paper and pencil test is composed of 45 test questions and 15 survey questions.

Assessment results have been used in the SACS Accreditation review, in the library self study, in academic program reviews, in accreditation reviews related to specific programs, and in improvement of the instruction program.

In addition to the assessment of student learning, librarians do a self-evaluation and are assessed by the supervisor, peer librarians, and faculty members in liaison departments.

Categories for Improvement

Category 3: Planning
- Our program is integrated in the General Education program, but instruction efforts are not as consistent across majors. Information literacy initiatives in the major depend solely on the efforts of individual liaison librarian to plan, implement, promote, and assess.
- There is a lack of planning on the technology-side of our organization. Any change to web pages and the catalog have huge implications for instruction, and frequently these impacts are not considered. Changes are inevitable, but coordination is necessary to address ramifications of changes to terminology, design and content.

Category 4: Administration and Institutional Support
- Some disciplines are inadequately funded for resources, and it is difficult to promote an instruction program without appropriate collections. While the library staff and faculty were highly rated in the University Faculty Morale Survey, the collection did not fair well, receiving one of the lower scores reported.
- Carrier Library has one classroom to support 16 liaison librarians representing 37 departments, and many courses have to be taught in other locations (without appropriate print resources) or postponed to less than optimal time slots.

IV. Evidence of success

Success of the instruction program at JMU is evident in:
1. integration of information literacy into the General Education Curriculum with all students (well over 3,000 freshmen a year) held accountable for learning and with librarians fully
engaged in planning and delivering instruction
2. development of Go for the Gold, one of the first web tutorials
3. liaison librarians providing high quality instruction to majors in nearly every academic department in the university
4. strong relationships between the library and academic departments with extensive cooperation on instruction
5. nearly 10,000 students receiving instruction each year.
6. a large body of assessment data gathered by reliable locally developed tests that show JMU students are learning important information-seeking skills
7. the requirement that all programs at JMU, when reviewed, must assess whether “students are able to locate and use relevant materials” according to the University Academic Program Review Guidelines
8. recognition by the library profession at state and national levels.
9. peer-reviewed acceptance of papers at ACRL, LOEX, and AAHE.

V. Unique quality and contribution

The instruction program at JMU is unique in that it is such a fully developed program with information literacy integrated into the General Education curriculum and into the majors offered by the University. The General Education program is particularly noteworthy in that it provides:

- instruction for all first-year students through an innovative web-based instruction program that includes online exercises that are scored electronically and a database of student scores that faculty may view.
- training for faculty on incorporating Go for the Gold into their courses and on making good assignments
- competency testing of all first-year students on learning objectives developed collaboratively by librarians, faculty, and administrators.

Our experience with assessment is also unique. We have a locally developed online test for General Education and several instruments developed especially for specific majors. These instruments also contain survey questions on attitudes and experiences. Over the years we have amassed a great deal of data on student learning for freshmen, sophomores, and seniors, and we have extensive experience with test development and administration. We have reported on our assessment efforts at ACRL, LOEX, VLA, Virginia Assessment Group conferences, and AAHE. Our program is frequently cited in the literature.

Finally, our program is unique in the level of institutional support from faculty and administrators at JMU and in the role librarians play. Librarians at JMU are full participants in the educational process, from planning curriculum and designing and delivering instruction to assessing student learning.

VI. Questions

1. How do other institutions view web-based instruction for information literacy? Is it really effective? Is there any evidence?
2. How do you maintain consistency in a teaching tool in a constantly changing environment?

3. How do you keep information literacy a campus/library priority when competing with issues about technology?