



Improving LIS Education in Teaching Librarians to Teach

Merinda Kaye Hensley



The recent release of the 2013 Ithaka S+R Library Survey indicates deans/directors highly value library instruction, instructional design, and information literacy services, and will be supporting these efforts in the next five years by hiring more trained librarians. This contributed paper examines current efforts of LIS education to prepare librarians for the classroom and presents a case study for a new, more advanced opportunity to prepare for the classroom while advocating institutional learning goals.



If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft. ~Parker Palmer

Introduction

The recent release of the 2013 Ithaka S+R Library Survey tells us that library deans and directors across the country are concerned about and value their students' research needs and they believe in the role that librarians play in the educational mission of the academy. In fact, the report surmises that, "Academic libraries' strong alignment around teaching and undergraduate education may have far-reaching implications for how they prioritize their other functions."¹ In areas of library instruction, instructional design, and information literacy services, library deans and directors predict that in the next five years they will be looking to augment their current organizational structures to hire even more librarians in these areas. However, the library literature in the past decade has been warn-

ing that there is a severe mismatch between the ways our library schools prepare graduate students for the classroom and that librarians don't receive much, if any, on-the-ground training for learning how to teach. While professional development opportunities have popped up around the country in many types of venues (e.g., ACRL Immersion, invited workshop speakers, webinars, etc.) this effort simply isn't broad or deep enough to adequately train librarians for the reality of classroom needs. Additionally, becoming well-versed in and *practicing* the elements of educational theory, curricular learning goals, and student learning assessment could significantly aid in advocating for and shaping institutional long-term goals of guiding students along the long road of information literacy. It is the time dedicated to connecting the theory with practice (praxis!) that is essential in building "teacher identity" as noted by Walter when he states, "Lack of a consistent teacher identity among academic librarians may hinder their effectiveness in meeting these expanding instructional responsibilities in a changing organizational environment."² In short, there seems to be a disconnect in what library schools teach and

Merinda Kaye Hensley is Assistant Professor and Instructional Services Librarian, University Library, Scholarly Commons Co-Coordinator, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, e-mail: mhensle1@illinois.edu

what library leadership is predicting are the needs for future hiring.

This paper presents an analysis of selected LIS courses and their efforts in helping pre-professional librarians with applying practical teaching skills and presents a case study for how the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has experimented with an advanced instruction course to assist LIS students in developing teacher identity.

Literature Review

It is no secret within the realm of librarianship that the role of the instruction librarian is not as much of a priority, nor as strong of a collaboration with higher education that we would wish for it to be. This has been attributed, in part, to our lack of “teacher identity.” While Farber’s eloquent review of the literature prior to the 1970’s notes that the librarian’s role in the educational mission of higher education went relatively unnoticed and was, at best, discouraging, library instruction has been steadily gaining momentum since then. There was a guiding sea change in 1972 when, as Farber points out, Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education stated, “... the library should become a more active participant in the instructional process with an added proportion of funds, perhaps as much as a doubling.”³ In 1987, Ernest Boyer continued this line of thinking by stating, “For the library to become a central learning resource on the campus, we need, above all, liberally educated librarians, professionals who understand and are interested in undergraduate education, who are involved in educational matters...”⁴ In 1998, one of the most impactful and dramatic changes to higher education came through a report inspired by Boyer, “Re-inventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities.” The Boyer Report, as it is often referred to, called for research universities to make research a foundation of the undergraduate student experience.⁵ There are many documented reasons in the literature why librarians should learn how to teach well; one of the more progressive reasons contributing to this argument is in response to an evo-

lution in higher education curriculum made possible through the Boyer Report and subsequent recommendation from the AAC&U to define high-impact educational practices.⁶ Deans and directors from the 2013 Ithaka S+R Library Survey acknowledge the paradigm shift with their prediction for the future need to hire librarians with instruction-related experience. As the academy continues to transform its focus from traditional classroom learning to high-impact educational practices, librarians should be paying close attention to evolving curricula as it collectively provides a significant step-up from workshops, one-shots, and even course-integrated instruction in offering an authentic environment in promoting lifelong learning and teaching information literacy.

There are several recent articles that contribute to the investigation of the growth of librarians as teachers. Walter provides a thorough review of the literature as well as a qualitative look into the current themes of teacher identity for academic librarians.⁷ In the professional development arena, Davies-Hoffman et al. describe the Library Instruction Leadership ACademy (LILAC), a regional program that works with practicing librarians for a semester on connecting a pedagogical foundation with practical experience.⁸ Brecher and Klipfel also offer an outline of strategies for practicing librarians, highlighting their personal experience supplementing an LIS curriculum with concurrent doctoral work in education.⁹ Admittedly, librarians are no different than any other discipline in its lack of pre-professional classroom teaching experience however, continued research on information literacy provides an increasingly strong theoretical foundation for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) community.

The question remains: why doesn’t LIS education include more of a focus on the practice of teaching? Along this vein, Saunders performed the most recent examination of course descriptions and syllabi from fifty-eight ALA-accredited LIS programs.¹⁰ In addition to examining general topics, theories, and issues covered in the curriculum, she looked to see what types

of activities and assignments were integrated in each course. Saunders found that the instruction-related courses include few practical teaching opportunities, concluding that most "...appear to be a disconnect in that while instruction courses require students to give presentations or lead instruction sessions, they do not always seem to incorporate instruction on effective presentation skills, or tips and techniques for public speaking."¹¹ While instruction-related courses in LIS programs remain elective, it is inherently true that almost all librarians teach in some manner throughout their career, whether it be for students and faculty as formal library instruction, at the reference desk, as part of outreach efforts, or staff training initiatives and one could argue that even library advancement efforts could benefit from skills acquired by applying the pedagogy of teaching. Teaching is inescapable for the academic librarian.

Analysis of Current LIS Courses Related to the Praxis of Teaching

As Brecher and Klipfel argue, "To truly become 'student-centered' educators, librarians need adequate training that is up-to-date on current best practices in educational theory and its application to the classroom context."¹² This following is a content analysis of selected LIS course descriptions and syllabi for concrete teaching experiences, exploration of the commonalities between courses, and an examination for areas of growth related to instruction and information literacy in formal LIS education.

Methodology

The ACRL Instruction Section's Professional Education Committee maintains two lists that are of interest to teaching librarians: the first, "Library Instruction Courses Offered by Accredited Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies," keeps track of current courses offered by ALA-Accredited LIS programs related to "information literacy," "user education," "bibliographic instruction," and any variation of "instruction."¹³ The second list, "Sponsors of Continuing Education Programs for Library Instruction," is

a list of professional development opportunities for librarians that are searching for ways to improve their teaching skills.¹⁴ This research matched the top ten ranked Library and Information Science programs from *U.S. News & World Report* (2013) with the list of instruction-related courses maintained by ACRL.¹⁵ The institutions used for this study include: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Washington, Syracuse University, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, University of Texas at Austin, Indiana University at Bloomington, Simmons College, Drexel University, University of Maryland at College Park, and the University of Pittsburg.¹⁶ When selecting from the institutional list of instruction-related courses on the ACRL wiki, the course chosen for analysis was based on the most representative match for teacher training of academic librarians; no K12 or school media courses were included. One match was selected for each institution for a compilation of twelve courses. Course descriptions and syllabi were gathered from institutional websites as well as through personal communication for a total of ten.¹⁷ All syllabi were taught within the past two years (2012–2014). This project was, in part, inspired by *Syllabus*, a journal dedicated to viewing course syllabi and its accompanying materials as scholarship.¹⁸

Themes of Practical LIS Assignments Related to Teaching

The following are brief descriptions of practical teaching activities as outlined in course syllabi.¹⁹ Practical teaching activities are defined as ones that put theory into action, where LIS students are teaching synchronously. This does not include the development of instructional materials unless they are part of subsequent and direct practice. The examples are in no particular order, they are combined from across institutions, and there is no identifying institutional information. It should be noted that not all syllabi contain in-depth details of the assignments and descriptions are written solely based on available information.

Most courses implement only 1-2 of the themes outlined below:

1. **Class presentations**—Not surprisingly, in-class presentations are the most frequently required practical teaching activity. The assignment generally asks students to take on the role of instructor by teaching a presentation of their own design in front of their peers. The time allocated for presentations varied widely (e.g., 5–20 minutes). There are several models for this type of practice: one course required three presentations increasing in time and complexity; one course required students to develop a presentation with the intended audience of the general campus community to discuss the value of information literacy; however, teaching databases was the most common assignment while a few asked students to teach a practical skill (e.g., how to knit, use a USB drive) rather than a library-related topic. The teaching exercise usually includes the development of a lesson plan with learning outcomes, outline of content, activities, and assessment, depending on the amount of time allotted. Oftentimes, students were required to include a PowerPoint presentation to accompany their session. Critical reflection is also frequently built into this assignment: requiring students to meet individually with the instructor to discuss their self-assessment; video-taping and subsequent review of the instruction; formal written critique incorporating feedback from peers; keeping a journal; and self-assessment forms. The focus of these sessions was often on presentation style rather than on teaching efficacy.
2. **Lead course discussion**—Another example of in-class presentation is to ask each student (or a group) to teach course content for the week. This could take the form of leading discussion of course readings, learning theory, schema, educational or information literacy concepts, etc. Students are usually required to construct a conversation with their peers and lead in a critical manner (e.g., comparing week-to-week readings, evaluate usefulness of the article, etc.). One course asks students to design an aligned active learning technique, though it didn't provide any examples for what that might look like, and one course has a group of students present on an information literacy instruction assessment method. For the courses that assigned this type of exercise, there was rarely evidence of critical reflection or self-assessment.
3. **Active learning presentation**—For this type of teaching assignment, students are asked to design an active learning segment on a specific tool, usually a database, to teach to their peers. This exercise was often combined with conversations about learning styles and two courses indicated that students were to take a learning style inventory. Several courses mentioned the impact of asking directed questions. One course assigned students into groups with each responsible for creating a different kind of active learning exercise, providing the class with a wide variety of examples for discussion. Once again, assessment was usually based on feedback from peers and the instructor.
4. **Teaching to “real” students**—There were few courses that included this type of instruction. The two courses that required teaching outside the LIS classroom were creative in their approach: one course arranged for students to teach at a local public library and the other included teaching as part of an overall practicum experience. Both exercises required students to fully develop lesson plans and assessments. Self-assessment and critical reflection was employed in both situations as a way to improve teacher identity.

5. Parallel practicum—This type of structure was rare among instruction-related courses, most likely because of the complexities of administering outside relationship within a single semester. For this assignment, students are required to spend a portion of time (10–20 hours) in an apprentice role. This type of partnership included several focus areas: observation, team-teaching, curriculum planning, preparation of instructional materials, general classroom preparation, etc. One course arranged for LIS students to teach a solo session to students at that institution. Critical reflection was mentioned in all cases: one course required students to write a “book chapter” about their practicum experience. This teaching experience differs from number four in that it requires an ongoing mentor relationship with a librarian other than the course instructor.

The ten syllabi include several other elements of the teaching process, one of which is observation. Most instructors are flexible about “who” and “what type” of session could be observed but it always includes a reflection of the teaching, sometimes within the context of course readings. The most robust courses include a combination of activities that build upon each other, for example starting with a short presentation and graduating to an entire workshop or instructional session. One of the courses requires the development of a comprehensive instruction plan (that was unfortunately never taught) including a lesson plan, pre- and post- tests, handouts, online guide, worksheets, and student assessment while another requires a comprehensive final teaching portfolio that includes all course related design materials as well as self-evaluations and teaching observations. Additionally, most courses require a version of the following: writing a teaching philosophy statement, constructing a written lesson plan, designing an online learning object (e.g., pathfinder, LibGuide, instructional video, etc.) and/or interview of an instruction specialist. This study focused solely on in-person teaching and

it should be noted that while creating online learning objects is one ingredient in establishing teacher identity, the feedback received from the course instructor and/or peers is not replicative to working directly with faculty and students. Indeed, this is the reality missing from all of the above examples—it is difficult to reproduce the complexity of preparing and working with teaching faculty and students in real time. And finally, there were a few other assignments worth noting: four courses assign more than forty readings for the semester and often include an additional text; only two courses require students to sign up for the ILL-L listserv, and one encourages active participation in a Twitter chat (#libchat).

Discussion

The descriptions and themes of practical teaching strategies bring further clarity to LIS course instructors and academic library administrators looking to improve opportunities for pre-professional students who need to learn how to teach. Do these exercises appropriately mirror what teacher librarians will encounter in the classroom? Is this enough training from the perspective of library administrators to meet their expectations for hiring librarians with instruction responsibilities? These assignments bring a brief and facilitated introduction to teaching into the LIS classroom but certainly doesn't accurately reflect the complexities of a the academic classroom or the nature of working with students, developing relationships with faculty, or comprehensive instructional design.

As evidenced by the brief examples above, LIS schools have a significant road to travel in order to better prepare librarians to be teachers. The courses are trying to accommodate two opposing forces within a single semester: teach the history and theory behind library instruction and provide opportunities to practice teaching. This research reinforces what Saunders concluded, “Even students in programs that do have instruction courses are usually limited to one such course, and actual practice in designing and delivering instruction sessions is usually limited to one or two opportunities within those courses.”²⁰

Case Study—LIS 590AE: Information Literacy & Instruction in Practice

In 2011, the Graduate School for Library and Information Science (GSLIS) approached the author, a practicing instruction librarian at a university library, with a proposal to create an advanced information literacy and instruction course to complement an introductory course that is taught consistently each spring and fall semester (Pre-requisite—LIS 458: Instruction and Assistance Systems). The request stemmed from ongoing interest from students searching for practical classroom experience. The practicum structure is the most common avenue for students looking to learn how to teach and is administered under the supervision of a librarian for a total of 100 hours, with approximately 25% of the time being devoted to a specific project outcome.²¹ The downfall of the practicum from the author's perspective is that as a practicing academic librarian, only one student can be supervised at a time and the demand was increasingly high for in-person instruction experience. The two parties collaborated to develop a course that would be modeled after the practicum format in that it would include mainly hands-on and practical teaching experiences rather than traditional course work, lecture, and readings. The first course was taught as a group independent study in spring 2012 and evolved into an 8-week course for spring 2013 and 2014.

The course was influenced by the peer learning program the author developed for graduate assistants assigned to work in the Reference and Information Services department.²² Critical reflection, as seen throughout the the content analysis of LIS syllabi, is the cornerstone of the course and as such, the text used was Booth's, *Reflective teaching, effective learning: Instructional literacy for library educators*.²³

Learning Outcomes for Spring 2014

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

1. Design, teach, and assess three different types of learning experiences based on sound pedagogy.

2. Use critical reflection techniques to review library instruction through the lens of learning styles, peers, colleagues, and students.

The author experimented with several practical teaching experiences throughout the three semesters including class presentations (in the form of Pecha Kucha), leading course discussion, and active learning demonstrations. Over the three semesters the course has been taught, a wide variety of guest speakers have been invited to present learning theory and instructional design topics which in turn, provided a discussion mechanism for analyzing different types of teaching styles.²⁴ Students also performed a learning style inventory and wrote a teaching philosophy statement as part of their final project.

Perhaps most significantly, each student develops a workshop throughout the 8-week course. The author manages "The Savvy Researcher," an open workshop series geared toward the advanced research and information management needs of all students and faculty. Workshops are advertised campus-wide and students from all disciplines are welcome to attend. Each LIS student is encouraged to be creative in designing a workshop of their choosing and example workshop topics include: Twitter for professional development, searching for research materials on a mobile phone, personal finance and budgeting resources, navigating LinkedIn for the job search process, creating infographics, searching for news resources, locating hard-to-find foreign language materials, health information resources, fair use education, and personal professional branding. Milestones for the lesson plan development process include a plus/delta exercise where each student in the course provides feedback for each peer's workshop.²⁵ Final lesson plans are to be outlined in the USER Method format as presented by Booth, which "walks readers through understanding an instructional scenario, structuring content, engaging learners, and reflecting on outcomes."²⁶ Students are required to create a lesson plan, practice their workshop prior to teaching, develop handouts and/or LibGuides, and structure a plan for informal and formal assessment. There are several forms of assess-

ment for each workshop: campus attendees are asked to complete an assessment form as designed by the student; peers are required to complete a comprehensive evaluation form that examines major elements of teaching as discussed during the course; and students must fill out a self-assessment critical reflection form which is shared only with the course instructor.

One of the benefits of being an adjunct instructor for GSLIS is that the author has a ready-made instruction program where the students can participate and teach in an authentic learning environment. The downside of this particular situation is that it does not reflect the course-integrated instruction that most libraries lead for undergraduates.

The consistent end-of-the-semester feedback from LIS students is to continue to add as many teaching experiences as possible to the 8-week course. Since LIS 590AE is meant to complement LIS 458, the time should be exclusively dedicated to hands-on teaching experiences. If the course were to expand to a full 16-week semester, additional opportunities could be added.²⁷

This course is just one example for how LIS schools can increase practical teaching experiences for LIS students looking to become academic reference and instruction librarians. In response to the recent Ithaka S+R Library Survey, LIS schools should think creatively about developing new partnerships in order to provide practice teaching environments. For example, LIS schools can and should lean on practicing academic librarians which in turn, could supplement their curricular efforts, local schools could partner to provide in-service teacher training, and institutional education departments could be collaborators in assigning pre-professional librarians to assist with curriculum development related to information literacy and team-teach with faculty in the academic classroom. Additionally, library administrators can contribute to teacher training by planning intentionally for professional development opportunities for librarians upon hire. Librarians will only realize their potential as true collaborators with teaching faculty when they are able to hone and express their full “teacher identity.”

Conclusion

Walter asks the fundamental question, “Teaching skills are clearly recognized as important to the professional work of academic librarians, but to what degree do academic librarians think of themselves as teachers when they consider their place on campus, and to what degree is ‘teacher identity’ a recognized aspect of the broader professional identity of academic librarians?”²⁸ This question is at the heart for improving our teaching collaborations with faculty. How do we continue to elevate faculty members’ perception of librarians as teachers? We become better teachers. If librarians improve our teaching skills, it is more likely we will be invited into the classroom and the curriculum development process, ultimately impacting students’ information literacy skills. The courses currently available at the top ten LIS schools across the country are starting to do their part in contributing to teacher training but as noted in the literature and as represented by this content analysis, it is simply not enough. With the practicality of on-the-ground teaching looming over recent graduates, it is unfortunate that most courses, while focused on the “... mastery of pedagogical skills, instructional design, classroom management, and strategies for the assessment of student learning,” remain relatively detached from the application of the theories of learning.²⁹ Furthermore, it is not a secret that new librarians rely heavily on their own initiative in seeking professional development opportunities as well as lots of time in the classroom to improve their teacher identity, after they are hired. This content analysis and case study informs conversations between library administrators and LIS curriculum planners as they look to the future to prepare for the increasingly complex and in-demand services of instructional librarians.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the instructors for graciously sharing their syllabi and to the LIS students willing to work in an incubator environment in developing the format of a new, practice-based course.

March 25–28, 2015, Portland, Oregon

Notes

1. Long, Matthew P. and Roger Schonfeld. 2014. "Ithaca S+R US Library Survey 2013." *Ithaca S+R*.
2. Walter, Scott. 2008. "Librarians as Teachers: A Qualitative Inquiry into Professional Identity." *College and Research Libraries* 69 (1): 51–71.
3. Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. 1972. *Reform on Campus: Changing Students, Changing Academic Programs; A Report and Recommendations*. New York: McGraw Hill, 50.
4. Ernest L. Boyer. *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 165.
5. Undergraduate research is defined by the Council on Undergraduate Research as "an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline." See: http://www.cur.org/about_cur/frequently_asked_questions_/#2.
6. High-impact educational practices include: first year seminars and experiences, common educational experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008). See: <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>.
7. Walter, 2008.
8. Davies-Hoffman, Kimberly, Barbara Alvarez, Michelle Costello, and Debby Emerson. 2013. "Keeping Pace with Information Literacy Instruction for the Real World: When Will MLS Programs Wake Up and Smell the LILACs?" *Communications in Information Literacy* 7 (10): 9–23.
9. Brecher, Dani and Kevin Michael Klipfel. 2014. "Education Training for Instruction Librarians: A Shared Perspective." *Communications in Information Literacy* 8 (1): 43–49.
10. Previous studies include: Larson, Mary Ellen and Ellen Meltzer. 1987. "Education for Bibliographic Instruction." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 28 (1): 9–25; Sproles, Claudene, Anna Maria Johnson, and Leslie Farison. 2008. "What the Teachers are Teaching: How MLIS Programs are Preparing Academic Librarians for Instructional Roles." *The Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 49, 195–209; Ishimura, Yusuke and Joan C. Bartlett. 2009. "Information Literacy Courses in LIS Schools: Emerging Perspectives for Future Education." *Education for Information* 27, 197–216; Detlefsen, Ellen Gay. 2012. "Teaching about Teaching and Instruction on Instruction: A Challenge for Health Sciences Library Education." *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 100 (4): 244–250.
11. Saunders, Laura. 2015. "Education for Instruction: A Review of LIS Instruction Syllabi." *The Reference Librarian* 56 (1): 1–21.
12. Brecher and Klipfel, 44.
13. See: http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/IS/Library_Instruction_Courses.
14. See: http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/IS/Continuing_Education.
15. Best Graduate Schools, Library and Information Studies. 2013. *U.S. News & World Report*. See: <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-library-information-science-programs/library-information-science-rankings>.
16. Since there was a double-tie for the number ten ranked LIS program, all twelve schools were used for the study.
17. Two courses were not available online and there was no response to e-mail requests for syllabi.
18. See: <http://www.syllabusjournal.org>.
19. In many cases, language comes directly from the syllabus in order to accurately reflect the nature of the assignment however, because syllabi are always written in a narrative style, the author has in many cases, pulled together disparate pieces of information to tell a story about the assignment. Similar assignments are blended together for purposes of continuity.
20. Saunders, 18.
21. The author has participated three times within the structure of the practicum experience available to GSLIS students. To learn more about GSLIS practicums, see: <http://www.lis.illinois.edu/current-students/practicum>.
22. To learn more about the peer learning program: Hensley, Merinda Kaye. 2010. "Teaching New Librarians How to Teach: A Model for Building a Peer Learning Program." In *Recruitment, Development and Retention of Information Professionals: Trends in Human Resources and Knowledge Management*, edited by Elisabeth Pankl, Danielle Theiss-White and Mary C. Bushing, 179–190. Hershey, PA: Business Science Reference.
23. Booth, Char. 2011. *Reflective teaching, effective learning: Instructional literacy for library educators*. Chicago: American Library Association.
24. Example topics include: applying constructivist learning theory, best practices for group instruction, writing student learning outcomes, collaborative relationships with faculty, backward design theory, creativity and innovation in the classroom, designing assessment for student learning, and critical reflection.
25. Plus/delta is an exercise where feedback is given in the form of positive aspects of the lesson plan (plus) as well as constructive feedback for improvement (delta).
26. Booth, 2011.
27. Cooke and Hensley outline progress of an advanced information literacy and instruction course with a practicing librarian and full-time LIS faculty member: Cooke, Nicole A. and Merinda Kaye Hensley. 2013. "The Critical and Continuing Role of Library and Information Science Curriculum in the Teacher Training of Future Librarians." *Information Research* 18 (3): paper S02.
28. Walter, 53.
29. Walter, 55.