Librarians Collaborate! Working Across Two- and Four-Year Institutions to Teach Information Literacy Skills

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Introduction

Transfer students represent a significant population at our nation's four-year colleges and universities today. In the fall of 2006 774,000 transfer students enrolled in postsecondary institutions. This number increased to 1.5 million students transferring to 4001 Title IV institutions in fall semester 2013. One out of three, or approximately 550,000 students, transferred from community colleges.[1]

Given the increasing numbers of transfer students four-year colleges and universities have begun to facilitate the transfer process and the success of these students after matriculation. Many institutions have developed programs to help this population, who need assistance adapting to upper level academic requirements and establishing relationships with faculty and students.[2]

The national trend in transfer enrollment is evident at Appalachian State University (ASU), a master's level institution within the University of North Carolina System. Between the fall of 2006 and 2014 transfer enrollment rose from 768 to 1148 students, and it is projected to continue to increase. The majority of these students transferred from community colleges.[3]

Recognizing the growing numbers of transfer students at ASU and the need to help them integrate into academic and social life at the University, the Office of Academic Affairs hosted a Transfer Symposium in the fall of 2013. This professional development workshop was designed to educate ASU faculty and staff about the characteristics of transfer students. Every academic unit of the University was encouraged to send a team to this daylong event. The Belk Library and Information Commons, where two of the authors work, sent a team of four library representatives. Information about national trends, transfer student demographics, and transfer services at ASU was presented and discussed.[4]

The information gained at the Symposium stimulated fact gathering and informal discussions among ASU librarians about information literacy instruction for this student population. The literature was clear that transfer student academic success at a four-year college or university depended upon their successful involvement in academics and the establishment of relationships with faculty.[5] Additionally, transfer students' academic success depended on the acquisition and use of information literacy skills.[6] While these students may have been exposed to basic information

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literacy skills instruction at community colleges, they often lacked the ability to apply these skills in upper level research assignments.[7] Instead, they relied on the information seeking skills that they developed in high school or at the community college. This inhibited their academic success at four-year institutions.[8] In 1994 Cox and Johnson demonstrated a need to offer information literacy instruction programs that prepared transfer students for upper level research. Phillips and Atwood reiterated this need in their 2010 article while also noting the lack of literature on this topic.[9]

Librarians at ASU realized that we had an incomplete picture of transfer students' information literacy skill preparation. It was difficult to identify transfer students in our upper level library instruction sessions but we had anecdotal evidence to suggest that some of these students were not prepared to meet the research requirements of these courses. After attending the Symposium and learning about the academic needs of transfer students we were convinced that we needed to enhance our services and instruction for them. As a starting point we believed that we needed to understand what information literacy skills were being taught at feeder community colleges and how these skills were being taught. We also thought that an understanding of our tiered program of information literacy instruction might inform the teaching of community college librarians. Communication between ASU librarians and our community college colleagues seemed imperative. A professional development workshop was one solution for beginning this collaboration.

The announcement of internal grants for Symposium participants provided an opportunity to narrow our knowledge gap and develop relationships with community college librarians. We were awarded funding to host a one-day professional development workshop for ASU librarians and our colleagues at feeder institutions. The workshop was designed to discuss the information literacy needs of students and to learn how information literacy skills were taught at our respective institutions. The idea of hosting this event was

based, in part, upon an examination of information literacy initiatives in other institutions and states.

Literature Review

Information literacy collaborations between departments within an institution or between community college and four-year institution libraries exist because individual institutions see a need for these initiatives or as a result of statewide articulation or cooperative agreements. The literature provides guidance on how a library may create these collaborations successfully.

Tag's 2004 study provided an example of an internal institutional need-based initiative. The Office of Admissions at Western Washington University noted a serious transfer student retention problem and felt that a process needed to be developed to retain them. The library had no data on the needs and information seeking behaviors of their transfer students. In essence, librarians assumed that these students would seek research help. Faculty assumed they had learned information literacy skills in their community colleges. Consequently, transfer students lacked the skills to conduct research in a larger academic library and returned to their community college libraries where they felt more comfortable.

Librarians at Western Washington University sought to reverse this trend by establishing collaborations with other departments on campus. Based on one-on-one discussions with successful transfer students and faculty, the librarians created workshops designed to teach specific information literacy skills appropriate to upper level research. They used ACRL standards as a basis for their initiatives.[10]

Kisker's qualitative case study analyzed a transfer partnership between one four-year institution and nine community college feeder schools. There were many challenges to maintaining this grant-based collaboration long term. Once the grant ended, there was confusion over who was in charge of making sure that the partnerships were sustained. There were disagreements about approaches, techniques and even cases of resentment in being told what to do.[11] This information is telling, as lack of sustainability is a key cause for

failure. There is little in the literature on overcoming these challenges.

The most successful collaborations are formed after articulation agreements or cooperative information literacy standards are developed for four-year and community colleges within a particular state. States leading such initiatives include Colorado, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Oregon and New Jersey.[12] DaCosta & Dubicki describe New Jersey librarians' initiative to design a rubric for information literacy skills after the 2007 Lampitt Law mandated statewide articulation agreements to facilitate course transfer between community colleges and four-year public institutions of higher education.[13] Librarians viewed this mandate as an opportunity to design an information literacy program utilizing skills progression as a core principle.[14] A task force of four librarians from two-year schools and four from four-years schools was charged with creating standards for information literacy instruction and a faculty/librarian collaboration blueprint.

The task force began by reviewing Wisconsin, Colorado and Oregon's information literacy standards, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation standards. The librarians concluded that they must identify the progression of information literacy skills necessary for transfer students enrolled in the first two years of college. They placed these skills at two levels, Introductory/Novice and Gateway/Developing and created a rubric based on the number of credits earned. Their completed document, *Information Literacy Progression Standards,* was included into the Academic Officer's Association of New Jersey's Guiding Principles for Affirming General Education Course Status. These standards gave information literacy the same prominence in New Jersey college curricula as communication, history, technology, mathematics, humanities, and social sciences.[15]

The work of this New Jersey task force can serve as a blueprint for collaborations between two and four-year institutions. However, the creation of task forces is

not always necessary. Communication between librarians can also be facilitated through professional development opportunities that attract academic librarians.

Technological change, the need for evolving library services, changes in information literacy guidelines, and the delivery methods used to teach information literacy skills have made participation in professional development activities vital to librarians. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Statement on Professional Development* states that librarians should "…commit themselves organizationally and individually to lifelong learning and professional development," and that academic institutions should support professional development opportunities for librarians.[16] In addition, the American Library Association's *Strategic Plan 2011-2015* lists Education and Lifelong Learning for librarians as a key action area.[17]

There are many opportunities for professional development available for information literacy librarians. Online discussion groups, webinars, seminars, and courses offer access to training, as does informal self-directed learning. Regional conferences, summits, and workshops also provide training. Many graduate schools of library science provide continuing education opportunities, as do organizations outside the library profession.[18] However, as Kendrick, Leaver, and Tritt note, high conference fees and travel costs coupled with tight academic budgets, stagnant salaries, small or inadequate staffing, and lack of access to current technologies may prevent academic librarians from participating in professional development. This is especially true on small, rural campuses.[19] Creating professional development opportunities that teach new skills and that give academic librarians from different types of institutions the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate is crucial if librarians are to remain current in the profession.

Transfer Students and the Library Workshop

ASU librarians realized that it was difficult to meet the information literacy needs of transfer students without input from our feeder school colleagues. We

submitted an internal grant proposal to host a professional development workshop to discuss information literacy needs and instruction at our respective institutions. Immediately after the grant was awarded, librarians at ASU's Belk Library and the Director of the Learning Resource Center at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute formed a planning committee for the *Transfer Students and the Library Workshop* to be held at Appalachian State University on April 8, 2014. In planning the information literacy workshop, the committee benefited from staff with prior experiences in community colleges, and consultation with the invited librarians about their expectations for a partnership. The committee met regularly to create the agenda, to select the feeder school librarians to invite, and to create the process of assessment and continuation of the collaboration beyond the one-day workshop.

We worked with the Office of Transfer Students to identify our feeder institutions. The librarians invited to attend worked at these community colleges and four-year public and private colleges. E-mail invitations and links to the workshop's libguides were sent to the Library Directors of each institution. We asked all those accepting our invitation to list information literacy issues they would like to discuss. Requesting this list of topics and expectations from attendees helped us create the agenda. (See Figure 1) As an added incentive to attend we offered a stipend for each attendee. Over 80% of those invited attended the workshop.

During the final planning stages of the workshop, the committee began to review the idea of collaboration beyond the workshop. A Google Group entitled, *Transfer Students & the Library* was created and included forums where the conversations and sharing of ideas could continue. Attendees were invited to join the group at the end of the workshop with the thought that that collaboration would evolve over time. We also asked participants to write down ideas they gained from the workshop for teaching information literacy skills, place them in a self-addressed envelope, and leave them with members of the committee. Three months after the workshop, the letters

were mailed to participants with the hope that they would have accomplished their goal and be reminded to connect with other information literacy librarians.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

During the Small Group Discussion session of the workshop, librarians were encouraged to share observations about the effectiveness of their information literacy program and its transferability to four-year institutions. We recognized that we understood little about each other's information literacy instruction. The professional workshop environment encouraged open and honest discussion. Responses to questions at the Small Group Discussions (see Figure 1) yielded several salient points. Community college librarians at out feeder institutions do not have a formal information literacy instruction program, while at ASU it is embedded in two freshman level general education courses, First Year Seminar and English 1000. We learned that these community college librarians teach information literacy instruction at the request of teaching faculty. This makes it difficult for them to identify potential transfer students and to tailor instruction to the research needs of those students. We also learned that this hit or miss approach to instruction may result in inadequate preparation for upper level research. This affects the academic success of transfer students. ASU librarians discovered that there is a need to share our process and resources with our feeder schools to help them enhance their information literacy instruction. We also realized that ASU librarians needed to develop information literacy instruction opportunities for our transfer students.

Participants shared ideas and the techniques they use to teach information literacy skills. Following major trends in the field, all of the librarians attending were interested in using digital methods to reach more students, to make their efforts more relevant to lifelong learning, and to find ways to assess the effectiveness of their instruction. Several librarians presented digital tools that were being used at their institutions. The workshop helped to create personal networks between attendees, which may result in the development of a

FIGURE 1
Workshop Agenda

TRANSFER STUDENTS AND THE LIBRARY

April 8, 2014

Agenda

9:20-9:45	Registration and Coffee
9:45-10:00	Welcome
	Review of the Day
10:00-10:15	Participant Introductions
10:15-11:00	Small Group Discussions
	1—What tools and methods do you have in place to teach information literacy skills to transfer students?
	2—To what degree are you successfully collaborating with faculty to teach information literacy skills?
	3—What skills do you think your transfer students have when they leave your institution?
11:00-11:10	Break
11:10-12:00	Group Reports and Large Group Discussion
12:00-12:10	Break and Participant Table Shift
12:10-12:30	How We Assess Student Learning—Panel Discussion
12:30-1:20	Discussion of Assessment Strategies
1:20-1:30	Break
1:30-1:45	Marketing to Transfer Students and Faculty
1:45-2:30	Small Group Discussion of Marketing Ideas
	What Works at Your Institution?
2:30-2:45	Group Reports
2:45-3:15	Why We Teach
3:15-3:30	Wrap Up

tiered program of library instruction in the future. Many respondents noted that the discussions at the workshop reduced barriers and anxieties about contacting their peers at other institutions. Attendees were enthusiastic about the idea of continuing the conversation beyond the one-day workshop. We created a Google Group to facilitate this discussion. Although a popular idea with all of the attendees during the workshop, momentum on the *Transfer Students & the Library* Google Group has been sparse since the workshop last April.

After the workshop a Survey Monkey assessment was e-mailed to all attendees with the purpose of gathering feedback on the workshop's success. The survey consisted of five questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the workshop?
2. Was the information presented for the workshop clear and well organized?
3. Which discussion topic did you find most interesting/useful?
4. Please comment on the information presented in this workshop.
5. Are you interested in joining the Transfer Student & the Library Google Group?

The results of the survey were overwhelmingly positive. All respondents either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the workshop met their expectations and will be useful/applicable to their work.

Conclusion

This professional development workshop provided an opportunity for librarians to meet and discuss information literacy instruction at their respective institutions. Sharing information and concerns about transfer students and their preparation for upper level research was the main focus of our discussions. In addition, we were able to partner with other regional institutions, share resources, and discuss opportunities for creating shared information literacy standards. Budgetary concerns and existing staffing patterns make it difficult for our two-year feeder institution librarians to attend national conferences. Our workshop provided a no-cost opportunity to learn from one another and establish collaborative relationships that will enhance information literacy instruction at our respective institutions. A possible result of our continuing collaboration may be the creation of a well-articulated, tiered program of information literacy instruction. We realize that this will require commitment by all librarians to keep momentum going beyond the physical workshop and our Transfer Students and the Library Google Group.

On an institutional level, ASU is expanding the services of the Office of Transfer Students and ASU Information Literacy librarians have established a close working relationship with this office. Our Transfer Students and the Library Workshop served as a catalyst for this involvement. Currently librarians are developing a transfer student information literacy instruction program. This program includes the design of a libguide and online workshops, as well as a library presence in transfer student orientations and residential learning communities. Librarians are also attending the National Conference for Transfer Students to learn more about transfer student needs so that we can continue to improve our services for this important student population.

Notes

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