

# From Embedded to Integrated: Digital Information Literacy and New Teaching Models for Academic Librarians

*Marisa Walstrum, Larissa Garcia, and Rob Morrison*

National-Louis University (NLU) is a mid-sized, not-for-profit university with a strong tradition of serving urban, immigrant, and minority populations. Our student body is non-traditional; these are students who work, have families or other obligations, and require more flexible alternatives for learning. Therefore, NLU offers several delivery options, including classes at one of our eight campuses in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Florida, online, or at off-campus locations; the majority of programs are accelerated and use the cohort learning model. To support these students and programs, the NLU Library offers library instruction in a variety of formats: face-to-face, online, on campus or at off-campus locations. The 13-member library faculty includes eight full-time and two adjunct teaching faculty who, in FY 2009-2010, taught a total of 254 classes. The instruction program is comprised of mainly one-shot, face-to-face sessions; however, we have learned that this traditional model does not allow for many opportunities to fully address information literacy concepts. As a solution, NLU librarians created a general education course, LIBR 200 Digital Information Literacy, that goes beyond teaching the technical tools and skills needed to conduct library research in order to introduce students to larger concepts of digital information literacy and information

resources that will be relevant to their personal and professional lives as they continue their lifelong learning after college.

This paper describes our experience launching LIBR 200, moving beyond traditional library instruction to integrating digital information literacy into the larger curriculum. By creating a credit course that focuses on *digital* information literacy, the NLU Library was able to fill a void in the general education curriculum, thus making it possible for LIBR 200 to be included in undergraduate degree programs. Because librarians are faculty and have fostered a positive and collaborative reputation throughout the University, the library faculty role has evolved to include participation in program development and the development and teaching of library credit courses in order to address the information and digital literacy needs of students.

## **Library Instruction: Traditional, Embedded One-shots**

The NLU Library instruction program is comprised mainly of one-shot sessions that are either embedded in a program-required research course or scheduled because of established working relationships between the librarian and the course instructor. It is difficult to

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*Marisa Walstrum is an Instructor at Chicago Campus Library, National-Louis University, e-mail: marisa.walstrum@nl.edu; Larissa Garcia is an Assistant Professor at Lisle Campus Library, National-Louis University, e-mail: larissa.garcia@nl.edu; Rob Morrison is an Assistant Professor at Chicago Campus Library, National-Louis University, e-mail: rob.morrison@nl.edu*

get more than one opportunity for library instruction in most classes because many NLU programs are accelerated; therefore, instructors can usually only spare one to two hours during one class period. These one-shot instructions are essentially a brief orientation on accessing the library from off-campus, navigating the library's Web site, and using select resources and services. While a main goal of this type of instruction is to present a friendly and approachable face of the library so that students will feel comfortable returning when research needs require it, much of the session is point and click instruction of information retrieval with minimal opportunity to discuss larger concepts of information literacy beyond currency and the difference between scholarly and popular periodicals. As Mary C. MacDonald et al notes, "one-shot' instruction de-emphasizes a conceptual understanding of information, the development of broadly-applicable research strategies, and the critical evaluation of information in favor of a 'which-button-do-I-push-next' approach to demonstrating sources needed to complete particular information-gathering tasks."<sup>1</sup> In addition, these one-shot instructions tend to be very inconsistent: some students receive repetitive instruction while others only minimal information or none at all.<sup>2</sup> In many of the graduate research classes, instructors will allow time for students to do research while the librarian is present and available; however, this time is used mostly to address specific research questions from individual students. Because of these drawbacks, the NLU Library faculty sought a more meaningful way to incorporate valuable research instruction and information literacy concepts into the classroom and go beyond simple "retrieval skills."<sup>3</sup>

### **Integrating Digital Information Literacy into the Curriculum through a Credit Course**

In 2008, a focus on technology and digital literacy was emerging institution-wide. The faculty and administration began to recognize the need to embed digital literacy into the curriculum in order to better prepare students for the changing employment landscape that had become more technology-driven. At the same time, the NLU Library faculty began to brainstorm the creation of a library credit course to improve library instruction and, more importantly, to bring *digital* information literacy into the classroom.

Although the term "digital" was used by key administrators to refer to technology skills and experi-

ence, the library faculty emphasized the use of "digital literacy" as outlined by the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign<sup>4</sup>:

The ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information; the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers; a person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment...Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments.<sup>5</sup>

Because the nature of information has expanded into digital formats and now includes understanding Web 2.0 and social media tools as well as other emerging technologies, the library faculty felt it important to transform traditional notions of information literacy to incorporate 21st century information technology concepts and include them in the library's course curriculum. As Sonja Spiranec and Mihaela Zorica note:

[T]hese programs [IL programs] have to change in content by moving away from their orientation to formally and institutionally integrated tools such as library catalogues, academic databases or Boolean operators towards the integration of tagging issues, the issues of reliability, authenticity and privacy, including various other questions related to learning communities.<sup>6</sup>

It was this emphasis on not only emerging digital technologies, but how these formats and tools impact our access to and notions of information that allowed the library to carve out what would be an important and unique role in the curriculum.

The library was well-positioned and well-suited to offer a digital information literacy credit course. Its reputation for innovative digital collections and services and the library faculty's known expertise in digital information literacy made the library a natural home for credit courses. These courses would not only be offered by the library, they would also be taught by NLU librarians. At the time, the Dean of the Library

was serving as Interim Deputy Provost, which put a major library advocate on the administrative leadership team. Also, NLU librarians are faculty and serve on all Faculty Senate Committees, including the Senate Curriculum Council (SCC), the academic committee that approves new courses. Therefore, in addition to major library support in the administration, our faculty status allowed us to pursue a credit course by going through the University channels with which we were already familiar.

SCC approved LIBR 200 Digital Information Literacy in the winter of 2008. The course description reads as follows:

This course introduces students to the concepts and competencies of digital information literacy, which include the ability to access, use, organize, create, disseminate, synthesize and evaluate information in digital formats. The “digitally information literate” student will be proficient in the effective use of information in digital formats as applied in academic programs, professional work, and lifelong learning.<sup>7</sup>

It is a two credit course conducted online or face to face. The course is constructed of learning modules; each module consists of an introduction or overview with objectives, required readings, videos or tutorials, and discussion posting assignments. Weekly topics include considering the impact of technology on information, finding sources and understanding social media tools and concepts, and evaluating sources and understanding the reliability issues and potential usability of Wikipedia. As Spiranec and Zorica suggest in their notion of information literacy 2.0, we discuss finding and evaluating “information spaces” such as “Wikipedia, blogs, social bookmarking services etc.” because they are suitable for teaching and research.<sup>8</sup> An annotated bibliography is the final research assignment that assesses students on the critical thinking skills developed each week.

The focus on *digital* information literacy, which not only incorporates information literacy concepts but also moves beyond the library to critically consider information technology, social media, and its role in society, was an important factor in the approval of the course. University faculty and administrators understood that digital information literacy would com-

bine library research with Web 2.0 services and applications and larger “technology in society” concepts to “meet the demands of the real world...and address a real audience.”<sup>9</sup> The value of digital information literacy is now being recognized across the University: recent program restructuring in the College of Management and Business and in the National College of Education has led to the integration of LIBR 200 into selected undergraduate programs as a required course that supports 21st century skills learning outcomes.

### The NLU Experience: Integrated in the iBSM

In 2008, the College of Management and Business (CMB) reviewed their Bachelor of Science in Management (BSM), the accelerated degree completion program for adult, transfer students. The college wanted to create a program that would include more pre-determined general education classes in order to offer a complete bachelors degree program in management and improve graduation rates among the target population of students. What began as a reference request to find information on retention rates led to librarians identifying a key study that would become the foundation of CMB’s strategy for revamping the program; an 2003 NCES report entitled, *Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates who Combine Employment and Postsecondary Enrollment*, describes working adults who combine careers with education and led CMB to focus on “employees who study” rather than students who work part time jobs.<sup>10</sup> Because of positive, past collaborations with the library, the research on student retention issues, and librarians’ digital literacy expertise, the CMB Executive Dean asked library faculty to participate in a faculty and staff task force to discuss the creation and implementation of an “integrated” program. The iBSM would incorporate general education courses from CMB, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and the Library and would include additional scaffolding for student success. Librarians participated in all committees of the task force, including Student Experience, Assessment, Enrollment Revisions, and Curriculum. Because digital information literacy is a desired learning outcome for the program, the library faculty worked with the Executive Dean and CMB faculty to include LIBR 200 in the program’s “development” term as a program requirement.

Important to the success of the course, library faculty made slight revisions to the standard LIBR 200

curriculum to make it more relevant to business and management students. As Jeanne R. Davidson notes, “Recognizing the relevance of the content to their program and beyond is an important factor in student engagement.”<sup>11</sup> For example, in LIBR 200 for CMB students look at various business databases available through the library and find current news articles that discuss the use of emerging social technologies in the business world. In the standard LIBR 200 course, it is important that students evaluate information from social media sources to determine whether or not it is relevant and useful. Therefore, CMB students search Twitter for company information and evaluate the usefulness of social media as a business information tool. Through activities that directly relate to the business world, students not only learn digital information literacy skills, but also larger information and technology concepts that will help them beyond the program.

### **The NLU Experience: Integrated in the Harrison Fellows Programs**

Beginning Fall 2010, NLU began to offer Elizabeth Harrison Fellowships to traditional-aged students from under-served populations who would attend daytime classes at the Chicago campus. Like students enrolled in the iBSM, the Harrison Fellows take a pre-determined set of general education courses, electives, and courses for the major (either the Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education or the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration). Again, librarians were involved in the planning process from the inception of the programs and helped to ensure that digital literacy would be one of the learning outcomes for this group of students. In addition to the traditional role of the library in which library faculty provide library orientations, staff open houses, and collaborate with other student service and academic support departments to enhance the student experience for academic success, the library faculty also teach LIBR 200 for the Harrison Fellows in the first term of both the business and education undergraduate programs. Like LIBR 200 for the iBSM, the course curriculum and readings are revised slightly to support the learning outcomes of each program and to fit a face-to-face, un-accelerated format.

The integration of our credit courses reflect some of the recommendations suggested by William McAskill, namely “the development of strong part-

nerships between librarians and faculty” and “the need to reach students early in their academic careers.”<sup>12</sup> It was because of librarian involvement in the program development and the success of LIBR 200 in the iBSM program that LIBR 200 was integrated into the Harrison Fellows programs. Also, the placement of the digital information literacy course in the first, or “development term,” of both the iBSM and the Fellows programs serves as an introduction to the skills that students will need for academic success and as scaffolding to support them throughout their college career and beyond. Although the library’s credit course is included in the first term, it is important to note that LIBR 200 is not a replacement for a library orientation, which is still included in both programs.

### **Assessment**

Evaluation and assessment is an important part of student learning and as such it is an ongoing project for the library. The library faculty developed their own course evaluations through Google Docs to gather feedback on both the one-shot library sessions and LIBR 200. However, these evaluations only provide feedback on the students’ experience, not on their learning. In the first class for the Harrison Fellows, librarians conducted a survey of students’ experience using technology and how they find, use, and evaluate information. Librarians also utilized a Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)<sup>13</sup> midway through the face-to-face classes to take the students’ “temperature” and to help determine what aspects of the course were engaging or frustrating. Technology and information literacy skills are not tested by the university; however, now that LIBR 200 is part of two academic programs librarians are working with faculty to assess student learning on the program level, a process that will be developed in 2011. Although digital information literacy can be assessed at the course level, additional collaboration within programs is needed in order to determine what students can and cannot do after they complete or graduate from a program.

### **Challenges and Next Steps**

The NLU Library did face challenges with the implementation of the credit course. The course was initially offered as a stand-alone general education elective, and, for those first few terms, most sections were cancelled due to low enrollment. However, once the course became required in two academic programs,

the library needed to add sections of the course to accommodate demand. At this point, the precedent was set to expand into other programs. At the request of the Social Sciences Department Chair, the library faculty is currently planning a social sciences research course (LIBR 300) to be included in the Applied Behavioral Sciences undergraduate degree completion program. In addition, CMB has requested LIBR 202 Critical and Ethical use of Digital Information<sup>14</sup> as a three credit course for an undergraduate program in fall 2011. LIBR 200 opened the door for NLU Librarians to participate as traditional faculty in teaching more credit courses.

As the library's teaching endeavors continue to grow, the increased teaching and work load for library faculty becomes an important challenge not fully considered at the start of this initiative. In fall 2010, which was the first term that LIBR 200 was integrated into the iBSM and the Harrison Fellows program, library faculty taught nine sections of LIBR 200. Currently, only five library faculty members are trained to teach the credit course; these five librarians also conduct library orientations and research sessions. In addition to the growth of the credit courses, the library instruction program continues to flourish. As responsibilities are reassigned to accommodate the added hours needed to prepare for credit courses, the new projects that are constantly being added, and the loss of library staff positions, the entire library faculty has experienced an increase in their work load. Library faculty and the Dean have been flexible about adding additional responsibilities; however, as sections of LIBR 200 increase and other library credit courses are developed, more defined policies regarding library faculty load will be needed.

## Conclusion

Our success integrating LIBR 200 into undergraduate academic programs, with the development of new library credit courses on the horizon, is an example of the ways in which traditional information literacy instruction can be expanded to include credit courses that are tailored to meet program outcomes. We have instituted a "new approach toward implementing information literacy"<sup>15</sup> at NLU, while also demonstrating "relevance"<sup>16</sup> to enhance student engagement. This new role still allows for traditional library orientations and embedded sessions, as these remain fundamental to our instruction program and are very popular with

students and faculty; however, credit courses provide the environment for more in depth consideration of larger issues. The transition from embedding library sessions at appropriate points in the curriculum to adding an entire course has allowed the teaching librarians the opportunity to more thoroughly address concepts of information and digital literacy, while laying the groundwork for more assessment of student skills and preparation for academic success and the workforce.

## Notes

1. Mary C. MacDonald, Andree J. Rathemacher and Joanna M. Burkhardt, "Challenges in Building an Incremental, Multi-Year Information Literacy Plan," *Technical Services Department Faculty Publications* (2000), [http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/lib\\_ts\\_pubs/2](http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/lib_ts_pubs/2), 3
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5. University Library, University of Urbana-Champaign. Digital Literacy Definition and Resources. <http://www.library.illinois.edu/diglit/definition.html>
6. Sonja Špiranec and Mihaela Banek Zorica, "Speculations in Documentation Information Literacy 2.0: Hype Or Discourse Refinement?" *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 1 (2010), 140-153, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.nl.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=52981075&site=ehost-live>, 149
7. National-Louis University, *NLU 2010-2011 Catalog*, (Chicago: NLU, 2010), 371
8. Špiranec "Speculations in Documentation Information Literacy 2.0: Hype Or Discourse Refinement?," 149
9. Ibid.
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11. Jeanne R. Davidson, "Faculty and Student Attitudes Toward Credit Courses for Library Skills," *College & Research Libraries* (2001), 162

12. William McAskill, "Information Literacy: The Leadership Role of the Academic Librarian," *College Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2008), 1-15, <http://www.collegequarterly.ca/2008-vol11-num01-winter/mcaskill.html>, par. 29

13. Brookfield, Stephen. Critical Incident Questionnaire. [http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/Dr.\\_Stephen\\_D.\\_Brookfield/Critical\\_Incident\\_Questionnaire\\_files/CIQ.pdf](http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Critical_Incident_Questionnaire_files/CIQ.pdf)

14. LIBR 202 was approved as a two quarter hour credit course in spring 2008; however, the course has yet to run due to low enrollment.

15. Owusu-Ansah, *Information Literacy and Higher Education: Placing the Academic Library in the Center of a Comprehensive Solution*, 3-16, 10

16. Ibid, 12

no. 1 (2010): 140-153.

University Library, University of Urbana-Champaign. Digital Literacy Definition and Resources. <http://www.library.illinois.edu/digit/definition.html>

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