The Reform Movement for the First Year Experience: What is Your Role?

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with

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to add my “welcome to North Carolina” in addition to those you have already received, from those who I trust are truly indigenous to the state (unlike me). I am now a resident of North Carolina but only as of 1999. You have come to a bustling, optimistic, new south, dynamic city which during my 32 ½ years living 100 miles south of here in Columbia, I loved to visit because of its vibrant arts scene. Believe me, 100 miles makes a big difference! So do check out the beautiful Blumenthal Center for the Performing Arts, the contiguous Booth Playhouse for live drama, Spirit Square, and more, all outside of the formal ACRL sessions of course. This is a state, unlike South Carolina, focused on its present and future, not the past. This is the state that had the foresight nearly some 60 years ago to launch one of the most celebrated research/information/higher education based partnerships in the country, the Research Triangle. This is the state which just very recently in November of 2000 passed the largest bond bill in the history of American public higher education, some 3.1 billion dollars approved by a 70/30 margin of the voters who voluntarily put themselves into debt for their and their children’s future. This resulted from an extraordinary partnership of the 16 UNC campuses, the 58 two year community colleges, and the 42 privates too,
all united to increase support for higher education. Of this gift, 2.6 Billion went to the UNC system and 600 mil to the community college’s. Wow.

Is this why I moved to North Carolina? No, but it certainly made me proud and respectful of my new home. I moved here for multiple reasons: 1) to take early “retirement” from the University of South Carolina at age 55; 2) to continue my work as a university professor, scholar, researcher, and especially as an activist change agent, to found a new research center in a little mountain town (Brevard—35 miles from Asheville, noted for its Brevard Music Festival and more), the Center being the Policy Center on the First Year of College, founded with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts and currently funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education; 3) to escape the unbearable heat and humidity of the central South Carolina summers which as a transplanted Connecticut Yankee I had never really adjusted to; and 4) to escape the moral oppressiveness of the failure of the people of South Carolina to rejoin the Union and remove the battle flag of the confederacy from a place of honor on the state house grounds. Before I proceed any further I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my colleague, Dr. Michael J. Siegel, Research Associate, Policy Center on the First Year of College, for his invaluable assistance to me in the preparation of this paper.

Now how then did I get here, to ACRL? I was invited to talk about the greater need in higher education for academic librarians—and the library—to play a more central role in the first year of college and be a part of the conversation about learning outcomes associated with the first year. In short, I am going to take this opportunity to argue for the
important relationship between your cause, and mine, the latter being the improvement of the learning, success, retention and ultimate graduation rates of first year college students. I come with a thesis, a question, and a concern. My thesis is that from my vantage point, my ability to measure this, academic librarians have been dramatically underrepresented in the national movement, now over 20 years old, to redesign, change, improve what has become known as “the first-year experience”; from my vantage point you have a very low profile in this movement and this leads to my question: where are you in this tremendous range of reform activities at play on the vast majority of America’s campuses? And my concern: the challenges are so great that we face to redesign America’s colleges for our students for whom college was never designed—all those who don’t look like me: white, male, formerly affluent, New England, Protestant and still property owning—students most all of whom enter your campuses wanting a piece of the American dream which now means working in an information based economy and world. Who better to assist and support them and teach them the new skills of information literacy—or, as Provost Steve Kopp of Ohio University has persuaded me to think and say instead, information “fluency”—than you, during “the first year experience”? But my concern is that you are not there in the roles of influence that you should be. Many years ago I once heard the former president of the Urban League, Vernon Jordan, say in a speech in Columbia, S.C. “if you ain’t in the room, you ain’t part of the action”! Ladies and gentlemen, it is my thesis that you aren’t as much in this larger room I am calling the “first-year experience reform movement” as I think you should be and this concerns me greatly.
Before I proceed, I want to tell you something about my experiential basis for affection, respect, and high expectations for the impact libraries and librarians can and should have on our new college students. I have to start with my own family. I was born before the age of television—in that I was a war baby, born in 1944 which put me in first grade circa 1950 when television arrived. But my parents were adamant that no television would ever grace our home as long as any of the children were still “at home”. It was their judgment that TV would interfere with an important developmental task known as reading. This one piece of my history makes me extraordinarily different from all of my students today. I wonder how much you know, think about, how different and/or similar you are from today’s students. By the way, I do know one thing about my presence here at ACRL, and that is I am a warm-up act for my friend George Kuh of Indiana University, who really has good data on characteristics of first-year college students which you need. So go to his session tomorrow.

About reading, you need to know how to read, and ideally, enjoy it, to derive maximum benefits from libraries and the benefits of the information age. So I am deeply indebted to my first grade teacher for two things: 1) discovering that I needed glasses; and 2) teaching me to read. That was transforming; I no longer had to depend on any adult to read to me; I had been empowered to read, think, imagine, find out things for myself. I would never be the same. My life long journey as an information literate seeker of truth had begun. I have no recollection that my public school in the little New England town of New Canaan, Connecticut even had a school library. But I remember vividly my town public library. I discovered there in the first grade my space, my sanctuary, my true birth
place of independence. It is my recollection that I figuratively wiped out the childrens’ section. I just couldn’t get enough of what it had to offer!

Then with the onset of adolescence, I learned that my library had another important developmental function. It was another kind of sanctuary too. It was the after school haunt, the meet and greet and check out each other place—as well as checking out the books. I met my first date there, the daughter of Norman Cousins, the editor of The Saturday Review of Literature! This wonderful place predisposed me favorably to what I was going to encounter in college.

And college came, a very New England looking little college on the banks of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, the oldest permanent settlement in what was in 1787 the Northwest Territory and now the state of Ohio. I had chosen to join Marietta College—where in this audience today we are joined by two Marietta faculty librarians, Sharon Douglas and Peter Thayer, who did not have the challenge of dealing with me as a Marietta student—a place where I had a very inauspicious beginning as a student, a first set of grades sent home to my family 13 years before the Buckley Amendment to the Privacy Act, 3F’s, 2D’s and 1 A at midterm; it was not a time for celebration and Thanksgiving at the Gardner household. But shortly after I returned from Thanksgiving “vacation”, I took part in my first powerful ritual in college. One very cold December morning in 1961, the “freshmen” as we used to be properly called (when the majority of America’s students were indeed men, and many still fresh—a word that first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1587 and is now no longer used in any higher education
system but ours) were roused out of bed in what used to be called a very politically
incorrect term, the “dorm”, and told that our presence was expected to move the library.
Yes, we moved the library, from the old library across the street to the new library,
named for a former Vice President of the United States, an alum, Charles Dawes. This
was my first coming out as a future campus leader. I didn’t know yet that there was a
penalty for volunteering, that good deeds do not go unpunished. So I ended up being the
first kid out of the old library and therefore the first kid into the new library with my arms
laden with books. And as the first kid out and in I was captured by a TV filming crew and
appeared that evening on the NBC Nightly News. I kept up that pace all day and at dusk,
I had bonded with that new facility. It was mine. I was invested. It had also helped me
forge a deeper bond, with the College, a bond that lasts today where I am a trustee.

The new library was a place I loved to go. I learned how to be a good detective there. It
was a place of quiet, contemplation, reflection, industry. It was also a place where I
could also watch my faculty at work. I could see what kind of periodicals they read,
where they browsed. We were, and still are, a small college and the behaviors of my
faculty were of special interest to me.

On November 22, 1963, I was sitting in my political science class waiting for the class to
begin. We were to discuss that day the most critical section of Plato’s Republic in which
we were to have learned the answer to Plato’s questions “what is justice?” and “why
should philosophers be kings?” Instead we learned that President Kennedy had been
murdered in Dallas and the world as I had come to know it would never be the same.
What was I do to immediately upon leaving class? All I could think to do was to wend my way over to the library, the best place I knew for solitude and reflection. I had changed so much in my first two years of college that I was no longer the praying type and all I could think to do when I got in the library was to find some things that President Kennedy had written, or spoken, as in his speeches, and so I communed and felt the presence of my dead leader in my very alive library.

It was also as an undergraduate that the library, really a librarian, taught me how the information I could draw on there really was power. This epiphany occurred in this manner. Roommate sign up period had come around for the following year and I had reached an agreement with a student from Liberia whom I had met in one of my political science classes that we would live together the following year. I had observed him in this class and admired how much more about American government he knew than virtually any other student in the class. I learned from him that his country’s constitution had been modeled on ours; he was a pre-law student who aspired to complete his legal education in the US and then return to his country. Anyway, I thought he would make a great roommate and so we requested each other. A few weeks later we learned that our requests had been denied by the College administration. Not wanting to accept that decision I inquired of the residence hall authorities as to the basis for the decision and was told I would “have to talk with the Dean”. And so talk with the Dean I did and was given an incredible explanation by this former math professor turned “Dean of Men”, that he had really done me a favor by preventing me from falling into a living situation that I would have really been unhappy with. When I did not immediately understand the veracity of
what he had explained he elaborated that it was his policy to house all “foreign” students in quarters to themselves because they “would be happier that way and so would we”. He further explained that “they smelled different” and that I would have found that offensive. By that juncture I had had enough of a good liberal arts education by then (3 years worth) to know racism when I heard it. The question was what could one lowly student do to challenge this authority? I posed that question to one of my many confidantes on the college’s faculty, namely, a librarian. And then she taught me one of the most important lessons of my life. In a matter of no time at all she introduced me to the Byzantine passages of the government’ documents section of the library; we found the act of Congress that had loaned the College the money to build that dorm; and we also found language in legislation that forbid the borrowers of such funds to practice racial discrimination in the use of the funds. So with the wonders of photocopying of the appropriate legislation, I took this treasure with me to an appointment I made with our College president; I requested he grant me my roommate request or else I would notify the Federal authorities we were in violation of this legislation. My request was granted and simultaneously we ended de jure racial discrimination in housing for foreign students at Marietta College. But for me what I had learned was that information was power. I learned an important lesson for how I earn my living as an adult. I learned that with the right information I could change certain elements of higher education. The library was the agent of that transformative change for me, that is the library and one of its faculty librarians who had taken an interest in what my student affairs colleagues have taught me is called the “whole” student and a concern in his co curricular life. Now that is a paradigm for your supporting the first-year students of today.
I could go on but the point I want to make here was that my attachment to the library and its faculty were a powerful attachment for me as a college student. And I carried that baggage with me into grad school and then the military, where, thank goodness, during OCS we were allowed occasional visits to the base library which was the only source of outside news and literature I was allowed to peruse for 12 whole weeks of mind control. I carried this baggage past my military time (during which I was a psychiatric social worker in the US Air Force sent to a base in South Carolina where the Air Force immediately ordered me to also perform some adjunct teaching for the University of South Carolina which offered courses on the base where I was stationed) Upon my honorable discharge at the end of my tour I stayed in South Carolina and ultimately took a full time teaching job with the University of South Carolina at Columbia. To fast forward here rapidly, the next important chapter of the library in my life came after the President of the University had appointed me as the first faculty director of the first-year seminar course, University 101. Let me say a few words about this course as it is the most widely replicated and emulated course of its genre in the US.

We started this course in 1972 in the aftermath of a major student riot. The goal was to teach entering students to love and appreciate their university (seriously) so as to prevent future riots. We are the only campus in the country to have ever started a so called “first-year experience” program to prevent riots. Many others get into this to enhance student retention. After studying the outcomes of this course we found, lo and behold, that first-year students who took this course had a higher retention rate than students who didn’t.
We found many other differences too, such as these same students were more likely to be more knowledgeable of student resources and services, and better still, to use them. They were more likely to get involved, join organizations, engage in assistance seeking behavior, see professors outside of class, and on and on. As our course matured (and me with it) we learned more and more about how we could intentionally introduce students to a modern university and to teach them the skills we wanted them to learn. And so we thought, why not introduce them to the library? Our Director of University Libraries of that period had other ideas and he believed that I was really a very dangerous character. He did not like students coming into the library in groups; he did not like students “talking” in the library. So to appease this powerful figure, I as a still junior citizen of the University developed with a colleague something that became known as “the Silent Library Tour” which students took upon swearing an oath of silence beforehand. This silent tour was taken for years by hundreds of sections of the University 101 course. As the years wore on we eventually had a change of leadership for the libraries and a whole new philosophy was introduced with respect to University 101 and the library. The new director was a historian who as a young faculty member had actually taught the first-year seminar. He wanted to see the University 101 seminar become the principal vehicle for introducing new students to the integration of both library and technology skills in the research university context. So he empowered his public service university librarian team to develop what they came to call “the classroom of the future”, a teaching facility fully dedicated each fall to the more than 120 sections of the University 101 seminar. It was a new era. First- year students were embraced, professionally speaking, in the library, and they could talk too.
At the same time we integrated into our faculty development training for instructors of the course a model for teaching information literacy skills that my colleague, Professor of Library and Information Science, now Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Charles Curran, developed, a very simple but brilliant strategy—that we taught in every section. Very simply it argued this: that we must produce self-reliant information seeking hunters and gatherers and to do so we had to teach and create the opportunity to allow students to do three things under our tutelage: 1) learn where information resides, where to find it, where and how to retrieve it; 2) then learn how to evaluate it, particularly important in this age of schlock on the internet: does this information meet my original need? Is it credible? Can I authenticate it? And 3) then I must do something with it: create something, solve a problem with the information, inform/entertain/empower/inspire others with it; but the doing something needed to involve some kind of activity and caloric expenditure that some of us might recognize as active learning. And that today is still our basic philosophy and practice. The Thomas Cooper Library then became one of the key common requirements of the first-year experience at the University of South Carolina. And we had ended that intellectually bankrupt pedagogy of waiting to teach first-year students “bibliographic instruction” late in the second term of college when they were doing their time immemorial English 102 term paper. Now they are learning that becoming a new student in the research university environment requires that they become acclimated to the library and its enormous variety of information sources very early in the first term of college as opposed to waiting until the end of the second term of college, and only then did we do this for the curricular motive of getting the kiddies
through the time immemorial English 102 term paper. I would argue that now to be successful in most courses in college, in the first term, let alone the second term, students have to have basic information literacy skills and to put those off until term two is indefensible.

Let me get now to my central thesis which I think I can do rather succinctly and some may say perhaps superficially. From my vantage point, as an educator who has been orchestrating since 1982 an international movement to improve the first year of college, college and university librarians have not been involved in the mainstream, the leadership, or even minor supportive cast roles on most campuses I have come to know the workings of, in this national conversation and effort to change the way we do the first year of college. My vantage point has been especially influenced by my role as the host, convener, of a series of conferences dating to 1982 known as the Conferences on The First-Year Experience. These are gatherings hosted by the University of South Carolina’s National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Usually, we host 4 conferences a year which draw approximately 2000 higher educators from this country and abroad as this truly is an international movement. When I say “higher educators” I mean this very generically. More specifically these attendees fall out about equally in three distinct categories: faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs officers. But librarians are almost never in attendance and in the sessions which range over an enormous variety of strategies to improve the first year, libraries and the issue of information retrieval and literacy skills are mentioned, cited very infrequently. This past winter is the most recent case in point and looks like the census of our attendees
and topics covered in any comparable cycle. We did one conference, a small one made much smaller by the economy, in January in the LA area, attended by 204 educators, not one of whom was a librarian; none of the 33 concurrent sessions addressed the role of libraries in the introduction of new students to college life. More recently, in late February at our annual flagship conference, the size of which was also reduced by the recession, we had 807 in attendance, of whom 4 were librarians. Of the 169 concurrent sessions, only one dealt with the role of the library. In fact, since 1997, first-year experience conferences conducted by the National Resource Center have drawn some 10,965 attendees. Doing a search on that number, we found that only 68 attendees had the term “librarian” or “library” in the address field, leading us to the conclusion that the first-year of college is not as prominent on the radar screen of librarians as we desire.

Another vantage point that I have is one from hundreds of campus visits, literally, dating for me back to 1977 when I made my first visit to another campus to learn, talk about, and work with others to improve the first college year. Before I make such a visit I request my host to arrange meetings, discussions with various stakeholders and constituencies. I ask to have meetings convened with the movers and shakers who are driving the first-year improvement conversation on that particular campus. And I regret to report to you that almost never, repeat, never, is the institution’s head librarian or even any of her or his subordinates represented in these conversations. So I literally don’t know where you.
But I know where others are. I know who are the main drivers of the conversation and movement to change the first year. For example, out front dating to the mid 1970’s, have been the student affairs officers. A subset of that profession are those charged with what is commonly known as “orientation”. For much of the past 35-40 years the student affairs profession emulated their academic leaders and assigned the youngest, most marginalized, least powerful members of their profession to welcome new students to college. This process for the most part was out of mind and out of sight of the academic leadership on many campuses. And I assure you, there was little thought given to academic content in orientation, let alone introducing students to the campus librarians and library and the concept of information literacy. But this is changing slowly as more and more campuses are deciding to pull orientation back in either reporting directly to or with at least dotted/shared reporting lines to academic affairs. But my own observation of this has taught me that librarians have been largely left totally out of the loop of orienting students to college in what passes as the institution’s initial introduction to what really matters in college. This makes me seriously question our priorities. This also fits well into a growing national discussion about the importance of raising student expectations for the academic demands, realities, challenges of academic engagement. As I said earlier in my remarks, I will be followed at this podium tomorrow by my friend George Kuh, from Indiana University, the developer of the NSSE, the National Survey of Student Engagement who will fill you in on this larger effort to raise expectations and increase student engagement. This is a powerful national conversation. Institutions and foundations that are funding this work are investing large amounts of scarce resources in
promoting this conversation and you academic librarians need to be more involved with this. I am sure George will get you even more fired up tomorrow.

Now, let’s just assume you wanted to get more involved in these activities I have been referencing as mainstream, widespread efforts to improve the first year. Who is pushing this agenda? In what kinds of activities on your campus might they be embedded? One source to find the answers to these questions is your very own ACRL Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries, Draft, and therein under the rubric of what your drafters call “Program Structures” where I find listed:

- First-year seminars; writing across the curriculum programs (put together on one line as if there was some intentional connection, which, unfortunately is rarely the case)
- General education core requirements
- Research methods courses in disciplinary majors (this is referenced further down this list and this could be connected to undergraduate faculty/student research initiatives, those for which first-year students would be eligible)
- Capstone courses; learning communities and cohorts (for the life of me I don’t understand why these are on the same line; see my Jossey Bass Publishers 1997 book, The Senior Year Experience; these two items represent a focus on very different periods and components of the undergraduate experience)
- Undergraduate research experiences (referenced above)/internships
- Linked credit courses (these are the same as learning communities)
- Experiential learning/service learning courses
Now what is missing, i.e. other types of major first-year reform initiatives in which librarians could and should be involved?

- Academic support/academic assistance, learning support centers
- Developmental education
- Academic advising centers
- Orientation programs (run usually by student affairs and usually with no reference or inclusion to the library)
- The Federal TRIO programs and similar ones at the state level, e.g. ACT 101 in Pennsylvania, HEOP in NY, and EOP in California.
- First Year Programs/Centers
- School-College Collaboration initiatives
- Residence hall initiatives, especially “living/learning
- Athletic academic support centers
- Supplemental Instruction

Now what does the work of our center tell us about the role of libraries in the first year of college? First of all, we have just completed a three year partnership with UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute. HERI, under the leadership for more than three decades of Alexander W. Astin, is the developer of the now 38 year old survey, The Freshman Survey, also known in the higher ed research lexicon as the “CIRP” which stands for “Cooperative Institutional Research Program”. This instrument yields the largest data base of American college student characteristics, and is in reality a data base
that presents a portrait of what these students were like at the time of entry, at matriculation, without the benefit of whatever our impact might have been. We (the Policy Center) decided that what higher education needed was a post test to the Freshman Survey which would tell us how students had changed in the first college year. So we undertook and funded a 3 year pilot study, now it its self sustaining and fourth year, known as “Your First College Year” (YFCY). And let me tell you what this says about first-year student use of, and satisfaction, with the library during the first year. Essentially, students report high levels of satisfaction with the library function. Of the 23,889 respondents from the 2002 YFCY administration, 81% reported they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with library facilities and services. When asked to report on their self-perceived changes during the first year in terms of their “library research skills,” 8.3% students reported their skills were “much stronger” than when they began the first year, 41.2% indicated they were “stronger,” but the troubling piece is that 50% indicated there was “no change.” No change might be acceptable if one is performing at an optimal level, but if a student entered college with poor research skills and did not change during the first year, there is a problem.

Another new tool for assessment that we have been co-developers of, with an organization called Educational Benchmarking, Incorporated is FYI, or First Year Initiative, which measure the impact of the first-year seminar course on various student learning outcomes. In terms of course effectiveness, we asked students to respond, using a Likert scale rating system from 1 to 7, to two questions about the extent to which the seminar course: (1). Increased students’ understanding of available library resources, and
(2). Improved students’ ability to find what they need through the library. A rating of 1 indicated “not at all,” 4 indicated “somewhat” and 7 indicated “significantly.” Of the 39,927 students responding to the first question, 48% of the respondents rated the question as a 6 or 7 (in the “significant” range) and 11% rated a 1 or 2 (in the “not at all” range), with mean being a 5.05 out of a possible 7, which is encouraging. Interesting, the scores on the question about the course’s effect on students’ ability to find what they need through the library were lower. Of the 40,181 students responding to that question, 25% respondents rated the question as a 6 or 7, and 16% respondents rated the question as a 1 or 2, with most students rating in the 3-5 range, with a mean score of 4.5 out of 7. This tells me that first-year seminars help students better understand what resources are available to them but are not as effective in improving their ability to find what they need through the library.

I want to go on now and share one model which I am particularly enamored with, the IUPUI “library consultant” model, which is part of what is referred to as the IUPUI Instructional Team Program. I find this really intriguing. Imagine this novel idea, that in an urban, essentially open admissions research university, one replete with even a medical school, educational reformers have decided that first-year students who aspire to be successful will need to participate in a structured intervention in which they take two linked courses, a one-credit college experience course and an introductory required course in the major, and in which each student receives close attention from his or her very own support team consisting of a departmental faculty member, an academic advisor, a student mentor or peer leader, a computer technologist, and a “Library
Consultant”. And consider this element: academic librarians work with other members of the Instructional Team to actually develop the syllabus for the first-year seminar course and conduct the course, and while the librarians do not typically attend each class, the serve play a significant role and become quite well-known to students as a central feature of the Instructional Team. Now just imagine this idea: that every entering student needs not just leadership from an outstanding peer, not just a good relationship with a good academic advisor, not just the opportunity to learn to relate to a caring faculty member outside of class, but on top of that all-star team, a library consultant as well!!!

Now let’s consider one more model from the trenches of how to introduce the library to new students, which I learned about recently at the Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience in Atlanta from a session conducted by a librarian and an academic advisor at Georgia State University. At their institution, librarians play a key role in helping first-year students become more information literate by partnering and teaching with academic faculty in first-year learning communities. Essentially, this provides for a “library module” as a curriculum component, where librarians teach either a general stand-alone GSU 1010 first-year seminar course or teach the same course as part of a larger first-year learning community. The successful outcome is that first-year students meet librarians at summer orientation, they are exposed to library resources in the first semester, they are introduced to critical “information literacy” skills, and they experience this in an interdisciplinary approach.
Now let’s look at some results from the 2002 National Survey of Current Practices,” developed by the Policy Center and spearheaded by my wife and colleague, Dr. Betsy Barefoot. In August of 2002, the survey was successfully transmitted electronically to 1,867 chief academic officers at both two- and four-year institutions. Of the 1,867 surveys successfully transmitted, 1,000 responses were received for an overall response rate of 54%. The first question asked whether an introduction to the library for first-year students is a required for all first-year students, required for some first-year students, an option for first-year students, or not offered for first-year students.

- Overall, 47% of colleges and universities indicated that introduction to the library is a “required program or activity for ALL first-year students.”

- approximately 26% of the institutions responded that the introduction to the library was a “required program or activity for ‘SOME’ first-year students—perhaps students in certain majors.

- And 23% of the institutions indicated that the introduction to the library was an “optional program or activity for first-year students.”

- Finally, 2% of the institutions indicated that an introduction to the library was “not offered at all.”
A question was asked about orientation to the library for first-year students, and whether the orientation was included as part of pre-term first-year orientation; provided during the first term through non-credit workshops, tutorials, on-line methods; conducted in a special credit-bearing first-year “library course”; or, included in other credit-bearing first-year courses, such as a first-year seminar or English composition course. We found the most common form of library introduction is through regular credit-bearing first-year courses. But, there are relatively few colleges that offer a special credit-bearing “library course”—some 10%. Finally, just under one-fourth of the respondents indicated that library introduction is either part of pre-term orientation or delivered through non-credit methods, such as workshops or tutorials.

There is a forthcoming monograph by Sarah Pedersen, who is a member of the faculty of The Evergreen State College library, on the role of libraries in learning communities. Part of a Pew funded National Learning Communities Project, it will be a significant addition to the national literature as a further clarion call for librarians and college libraries to re-imagine their role and become more involved in the national conversation on the first-year experience. The monograph, which will be titled, Learning Communities and the Academic Library, was inspired by the work of Barbara Leigh Smith, the Director of the National Learning Communities Project and a close friend and colleague, when she was preparing for a keynote speech in 2002 to this very audience and interviewing faculty colleagues about instructional programs and the use of the library in their work. Her speech explored the learning communities movement, its prospects for transforming the
undergraduate experience, and the important role that libraries might play in that transformation.

The resulting monograph not only examines the possibilities of what learning communities can do on campus, but it suggests many of the ways in which the library can be involved, including literacy across the curriculum, residential learning communities, and librarians as support team members on such things are research projects integrated within the first-year experience. The monograph provides a very comprehensive representation of learning community models around the country that involve the library function, including:

- **California State University-Hayward**, which requires a one-credit library course linked to first-year theme-based clusters
- **University of Hawaii**, which awards an ACRL Instruction section award for Innovation in Instruction to the University of Hawaii at Manoa Library
- **Bellevue Community College**, which has established a Critical Thinking and Information Literacy across the Curriculum Initiative based in the sciences
- **LaGuardia Community College**, which offers a variety of fully integrated learning community programs
- **Washington State University**, which offers a collaborative model between the Library Instruction department and the Freshman Seminar function geared toward the need to institutionalize approaches to information literacy
The University of Michigan, which offers what is called an Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program in Residence, in which a number of students who live together in a residential learning community experience do hands-on research and are directly supported by the resources of a small branch library.

These are just a few case studies and examples of the power of possibility when the library and first-year learning communities are in partnership.

Librarians can also play a major role in faculty development in terms of instructional systems technology and other means. The central message I am trying to convey here is that librarians, and libraries, more than ever need to forge new and strategic partnerships on campus.

As Sarah Pedersen poignantly says in the new monograph, “…libraries are in a fertile period of change,” and learning communities provide one of the most promising avenues for not only collaboration, but also in helping the library function transform itself into a powerful component in the first year of college. And she has some suggestions for how libraries and librarians can meet the challenge of change:

- Bring learning communities and information literacy closer together
- Offering effective information literacy training for incoming students in order to ensure their success
- Forging key partnerships not only at the local level, but at the national level around undergraduate research
- Rethinking role and reward systems and issues of institutional mission to give more support to the library
- Have librarians play a central part in leading faculty development programs!!!
• One in 10 institutions reported having less than 1% of the curriculum devoted to the library component
• 44% reported that 1-5 percent of the curriculum was devoted the library component
• 29% reported that 6-10 percent of the curriculum was devoted to the library
• 7% reported having 11-15 percent of the curriculum devoted to the library function
• 3% reported having 16-20 percent of the curriculum devoted to the library function
• Only 3% of the institutions indicated that 21 percent or more of the First-Year Experience curriculum was devoted to the library component

And the content of the library component varies as well. At best, students are instructed to conduct an in-depth research project which requires them to physically use the library as a resource, consult with library staff, and retrieve information from multiple library resources. At worst, students engage in a “scavenger hunt”-type activity where a stopover at the library to obtain a signature indicating they have performed the task is one of many activities designed to familiarize first-year students with campus resources. The point here is that a greater amount of attention should be to Information Literacy in the First-Year Experience curriculum, and this audience is the group that should be driving that notion.
Finally, a further word should be mentioned about the impact of technology on the library. As the use of electronic and web-based resources increases and the pattern of library use around the country decreases—in terms of study space as well as a place to retrieve scholarly information—libraries face a significant challenge in trying to maintain the academic and social vitality they once enjoyed. Many students think the library of today is outmoded and irrelevant, and they instead rely on other sources of sources of information, particularly electronic sources, for their education. A resulting problem is that students, particularly first-year students, have a hard time discerning between what is valid information on the Internet and what is not, what qualifies as appropriate data and information for their research papers and what does not. An Information Technology Librarian, Bonny Imler from Penn State Altoona, has submitted a proposal for a conference presentation at the International Conference on the First-Year Experience in Vancouver later this summer on evaluating web pages and the role the library, and librarians, can play in equipping students with the requisite electronic-based knowledge to verify research, authors, and valid web information for their research projects.

Another proposal for the Vancouver conference, submitted by two librarians from Northern Arizona University, John Doherty and Kevin Ketchner, will ask attendees to re-imagine the role of the academic library and the development of what the Association of American Colleges and Universities termed in one of their reports, the “Intentional Learner.” They will discuss the development of library programs at their university and make the case for implementing a dynamic assessment plan in an effort to evaluate and improve first-year programs. And they will underscore the notion that students can only
be Intentional Learners when they have mastered the basic skills and concepts of information seeking, retrieval, and analysis or evaluation.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, I mean, back at the library, if you accepted my contention that you are under-involved, and if you agree this is not a desirable state of affairs and wanted to change the status quo, what’s to be done about this. I see a number of options:

1. My first recommendation is that you consider the relationship of the library to the first point of contact between your new students and your campus, the enrollment management process. I wonder how many of you know what the “million dollar walk” is? This is the tour that the Admissions office provides for prospective students. My recommendation is that you become an active player in shaping and influencing, writing the script even, that is used by the undergraduate student tour guides as they take these potential new students through your library.

2. Following immediately from that, I would encourage you to work with your Enrollment Management colleagues to devise some means to begin giving your newly admitted students, after they have made their deposits, but not yet matriculated, some connection (pun intended) with your library, and to the extent possible, library privileges and initial orientation via a virtual introductory process if not one in person.
3. Of great importance, you have to take the initiative. Unfortunately, many of your campus colleagues still are living in the old mental paradigm and think of the library as a place and one that confines you to it. They aren’t thinking that you have the skills that many students need the most to get what entering students tell us is the number one reason they are going to college: to get a good job; and the key to that in this economy is information literacy skills. You have the skills that they need to learn and use now in every area of their college lives. Remember, the old American economy used to make “things”—now we make information.

4. Currently our Policy Center has a project underway to develop what we are calling “Hallmarks of Excellence in the First Year of College”. We invited 950 institutions to get involved and some 215 have actually taken us up on the invitation. Specifically, we are working with 119 institutions from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and 96 institutions from the Council of Independent Colleges, AASCU representing the regional comprehensive publics and CIC the small, independent colleges. Each of these participating campuses has assembled a task force to grapple with our challenge to them to take an initial draft of these essential Hallmarks and to suggest revisions. The overall goal here is to develop these Hallmarks to represent an aspirational model for excellence and then to develop a certification process to determine how campuses measure up to the proposed standards. As they are currently written in draft form, there is not a Hallmark for information literacy competencies and pedagogies and we are waiting to see if any campus suggests
one. That may be up to someone in this audience. I urge you to get on our web site and see if your campus is participating and if it is contact the liaison person so indicated on the web site and demand a piece of the action. Remember, “if you ain’t in the room, you ain’t part of the action!”

5. I have mentioned previously, the practice of orientation to college life. Every campus has some kind of orientation template, process, program. Most do not include librarians in the design or execution. It is high time you asked to be included. In our discussions with about 85 campus liaisons, Mike Siegel, my Policy Center colleague and co-author of our the chapter for ACRL, and I have learned that only three institutions have appointed a librarian to serve in that process.

6. Recent research of our Policy Center has determined that 94% of the regionally accredited, undergraduate degree granting colleges and universities offer some kind of course known as the “first-year seminar”. These are the most characteristic intervention to assist students in the transition process to college. If you are not significantly involved in your campus’ first-year seminar you need to be! What are you waiting for? See the course director. If your campus has a first-year seminar you should be teaching in it! Better yet, some of you should be directing one. In that vein, I know of only one first-year seminar in the whole country that is directed by a librarian and that is Cumberland University in Lebanon, TN, where that librarian is Michelle Noel. And taking this a step
further, I know of only one university in the country where the institution’s entire first-year reform initiatives are coordinated by a librarian, and that is the University of Cincinnati, where the librarian in question is Associate Provost Linda Cain. My own university, thank goodness, has also been one long served by an Associate Provost, who is also a professor of library and information science, John Olsgaard, which means that the first year at USC is also in better hands than were he not in that critical position. And so I want to know again, why are not more of you in such halls of power in academe?

7. A more recent phenomena, curricular intervention, is the learning community concept. Forthcoming published research conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts funded National Learning Communities project show some positive evidence of involvement by librarians. Overall, the evidence of effectiveness of this intervention shows great promise in terms of increased GPA, retention, satisfaction. Again, if there is a learning community program on your campus and you aren’t involved, you need to be.

8. Unfortunately, many/most even, campuses do not have a standing committee/task force to meet regularly to discuss, monitor, and advise for policy formulation, the overall status of the first-year experience. But some do. If yours does and you aren’t on it, you should be represented. If yours doesn’t, you should suggest one. You can never improve the first year until you get all the players together to
discuss their common interests and responsibilities for the improvement of the first year.

9. Regardless of what is being done at the institutional level, where you often don’t have as much of a say, the domain where you do exercise much more control is the library itself. In that spirit, I recommend that each of your libraries establish a task force of librarians and fellow campus stakeholders in the first year to undertake a study on your campus of the relationship between librarians and the first-year curriculum and its students. Just how first-year student friendly is your culture? How high a priority is it for your organization to proactively identify the needs of first-year course faculty for specialized library support?

10. And better yet, I recommend that a national study sponsored by ACRL be undertaken, looking at exactly the same issue: How could the profession make improving the first year of the college experience a higher priority for planning, resource allocation, pedagogy for teaching information literacy skills, faculty development, and broader college and university service performed by librarians in first-year programs than it currently is today?

I would also like to issue an invitation to ACRL to join me and my colleagues in the USC National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, to jointly produce and disseminate
a major monograph on the role of the library in promoting information fluency in the first year of college.

This is my charge to you, not a dare. I strongly, but regretfully, believe, that you don’t, but you should, have a large enough piece of the action, the action in improving the first year college experience. I stand ready to support and salute your efforts.

Thank you for having me.

Referenced Works


