

Improving Instruction: What Librarians Can Learn from the Study of College Teaching

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Professional Identity and the Teaching Librarian

“I didn’t become a librarian because I wanted to teach. In fact, the thought of teaching scared me to death.”

Source: Blakeselee, S. (1998). Librarian in a strange land: Teaching a freshman orientation course. *Reference Services Review*, 26 (2), 73-78.

Do Librarians Teach?

- Academic librarians have provided formal and informal instruction for over 100 years, including:
 - One-on-one instruction at the reference desk and through research consultation
 - Course-integrated instruction
 - Drop-in and custom workshops
 - Credit courses
 - Learning communities
 - Faculty and staff development programs

How Much Do Librarians Teach?: KU Case Study

■ Classes Taught:

- 697 (1999-2000)
- 759 (2000-01)
- 712 (2001-02)
- 751 (2002-03)
- 828 (2003-04)

■ Students Taught:

- 9,540 (1999-2000)
- 10,918 (2000-01)
- 11,820 (2001-02)
- 13,161 (2002-03)
- 16,036 (2003-04)

➤ Increase in classes taught (1999-2004) – 19%

➤ Increase in students taught (1999-2004) – 68%

Questions for Teaching Librarians

- How do librarians become better teachers?
- What motivates librarians to pursue professional development opportunities aimed at helping them to improve their instructional performance?
- In what ways are librarians supported in these professional development efforts by their organizations?
- In what ways (if at all) is the instructional effectiveness of librarians formally reviewed and evaluated?

A Broader Context – The Study of College Teaching

- How well prepared are our colleagues among the teaching faculty to teach?
 - Graduate education is only “indirectly concerned with teaching.” (Eble 1972)
 - Graduate education “has been found to be generally ineffective in preparing [college professors] for their role as teachers.” (Cuseo 1989)
 - “Most new faculty members enter the classroom untrained and ill prepared to teach.” (Seldin 1990)
 - Faculty “are socialized about teaching in the most haphazard way.” (Tierney & Bensimon 1996)
 - “We have never really prepared graduate students to become college professors.” (Gaff & Pruitt-Logan 1998)

A Broader Context – The Study of College Teaching

- Instructional improvement
 - A term used to identify faculty development programs aimed at helping college faculty to improve their performance in the classroom
 - Five broad categories (Weimer & Lenze 1997)
 - Workshops and seminars
 - Consultation with instructional designers and campus teaching experts
 - Instructional grant programs
 - Distribution of resource materials
 - Programs that support collegial review and support of teaching activities

A Broader Context – The Study of College Teaching

- Evaluation of Teaching
 - Student evaluations
 - Peer evaluations
 - Classroom observation
 - Peer review of instructional materials
 - Supervisory evaluations
 - Self-evaluation (reflection)
 - Teaching portfolios

Why Mix Improvement and Evaluation?

“A faculty evaluation system implemented without reference or connection to a faculty development program will generate a greater amount of anxiety and resistance among the faculty than if it is part of a larger faculty development effort. Likewise . . . faculty development programs, operated in isolation or without reference to a faculty evaluation program, tend to attract mainly those faculty who need their services the least.”

Source: Aleamoni, L. M. (1997). Issues in linking instructional-improvement research to faculty development in higher education. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11, 31-37.

A Broader Context – The Study of College Teaching

- The “Culture of Teaching”
 - “How can institutions bring a new professionalism to teaching? First and foremost, they must create **a campus climate that supports and rewards effective teaching** and accord such teaching a status equal to that of scholarly research and publication.”

Source: Seldin, P., et al. (1990). *How administrators can improve teaching: Moving from talk to action in higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

What Does a “Culture of Teaching” Look Like?

- Commitment and support from high-level administrators
- Faculty involvement with, and sense of ownership of, instructional improvement programming
- Recognition of the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (SoTL)
- Required demonstration of teaching as part of the hiring process
- Frequent interaction and collaboration among faculty on teaching-related issues
- Support for a campus teaching center
- Supportive and effective department chairs
- Connection between rigorous evaluation of instructional performance and decisions regarding promotion and tenure (Feldman & Paulsen 1999; Paulsen & Feldman 1995)

What Does Administrative Support for a “Culture of Teaching” Look Like?

- A supportive administrator will:
 - Make teaching effectiveness a high priority for the unit
 - Create a climate of trust where peer review is not threatening
 - Require a teaching demonstration for all hires
 - Talk about teaching at unit meetings
 - Begin a teaching committee
 - Develop a mentoring system focused on teaching
 - Support faculty attendance at instructional improvement programs (Lucas 1990)

Design of the Survey

- Based on earlier surveys of instructional improvement activities among college faculty and of professional development activities among academic librarians
- Administered to 461 public services librarians employed at 13 randomly selected ARL member libraries in the United States during Summer 2004

Results: Activities Likely to be Helpful in Improving Your Own Teaching

- Consult colleagues in the library (36%)
- Attend workshop sponsored by in-house training program (23%)
- Continuing education in the field of Education/Psychology/Instructional Design (22%)
- Attend a professional conference that includes programs on information literacy (20%)
- Talk with campus faculty about teaching (20%)

Results: Instructional Improvement Activities Engaged in Most Frequently

- Activities engaged in at least **monthly**:
 - Read professional literature related to library instruction (57%)
 - Read professional literature related to college teaching or higher education (36%)
 - Consult colleagues in library (35%)
 - Talk with campus faculty about teaching (25%)
- Activities engaged in at least **yearly**:
 - Attend a professional conference that includes information literacy programming (67%)
 - Attend a workshop sponsored by an in-house training program (58%)

Results: Factors Most Likely to Influence a Decision to Participate in an Instructional Improvement Activity

- Topic is directly applicable to my work (44%)
- Personal interest in topic (40%)
- Availability of funding for participation (30%)
- Opportunity to build on existing interests (22%)

Results: Methods of Assessment of Instructional Performance Used in Academic Libraries

- Only 46% of respondents reported that assessment of instruction was part of professional review processes (e.g., annual review)
- Among those, the following methods were used:
 - Student evaluation (57%)
 - Self-assessment (49%)
 - Peer evaluation (49%)
 - Supervisor evaluation (25%)
 - Teaching portfolios (7%)

Results: Building a Culture of Teaching in Academic Libraries

■ Factors Most Likely to Improve Instruction

- Administration recognizes importance of instruction (69%)
- Administration promotes instruction as a core service (63%)
- Teaching specifically recognized in review processes (62%)
- Funding available to attend workshops on teaching (52%)
- Orientation for librarians new to teaching (50%)

■ Factors Most Commonly Visible in Libraries

- Administration recognizes importance of instruction (77%)
- Teaching specifically recognized in review processes (70%)
- Administration promotes instruction as a core service (68%)
- Administration gives visibility to instructional improvement activities (55%)
- Hiring practices require teaching demonstration (54%)

Implications for Research and Practice

- Ongoing significance of continuing education for teaching librarians
- Value placed on peer interactions
 - Formal (e.g., peer review programs)
 - Informal (e.g., retreats, teaching circles)
 - Need to facilitate “good conversation about teaching” in libraries

Implications for Research and Practice

- Critical role of administrative leadership for instructional improvement initiatives
 - How willing (and how well prepared) are library administrators to act as instructional leaders for their professional staff and to focus campus attention on the role of the librarian as college teacher?
- Librarian as producer and consumer of instructional improvement programming
 - How are librarians integrated into campus-wide instructional improvement programs?
- Librarian as adult learner

Why Study Instructional Improvement?

“The quality of student learning is directly, although not exclusively, related to the quality of teaching. Therefore, one of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching.”

Source: Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Further Reading, Resources, and Discussion

- Please visit the ACRL Virtual Conference for:
 - The complete conference paper and bibliography
 - A copy of these presentation slides
 - Threaded discussion questions related to my presentation today
- For links to existing instructional improvement programs in academic libraries, please visit <http://people.ku.edu/~slwalter/instruction/>

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